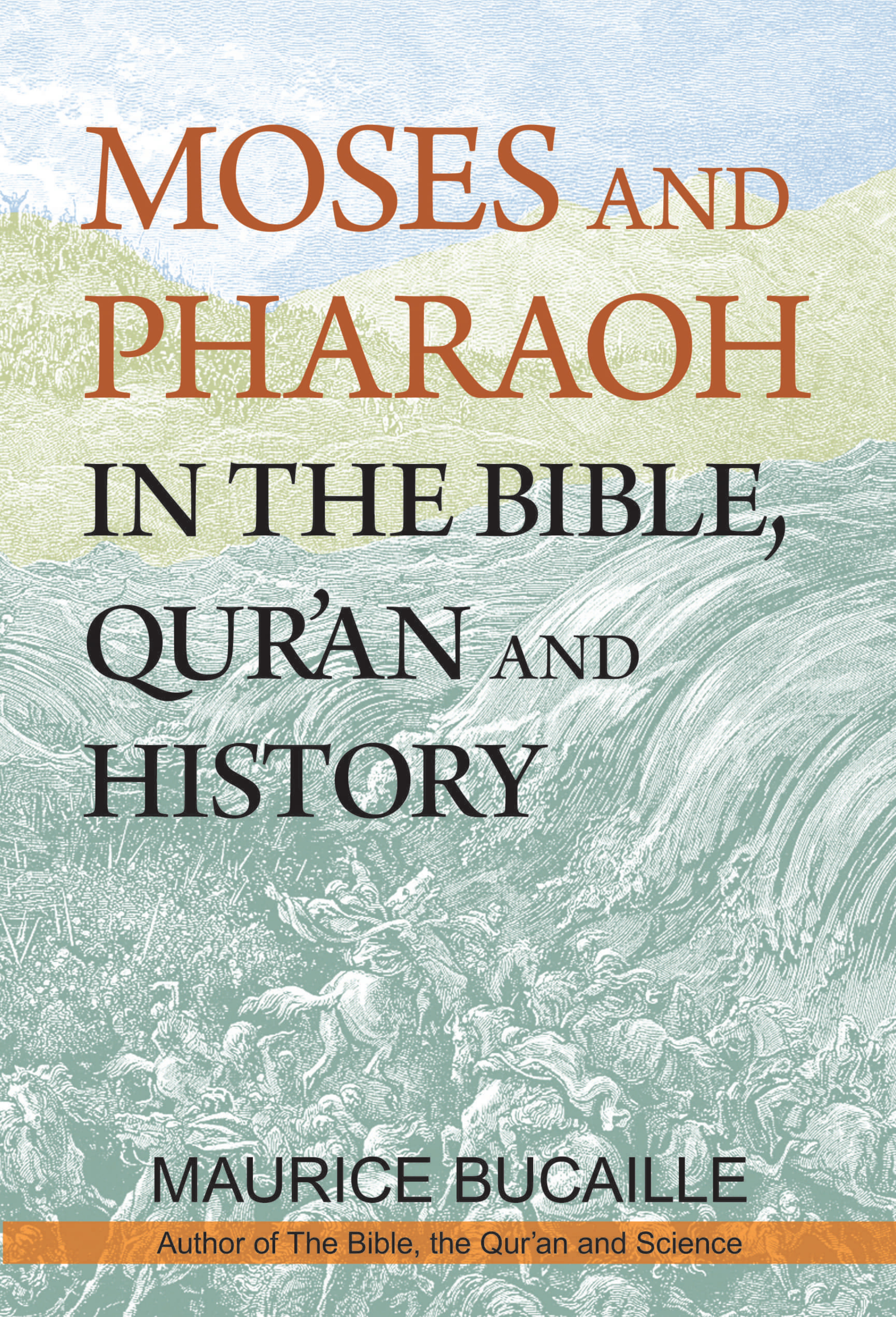
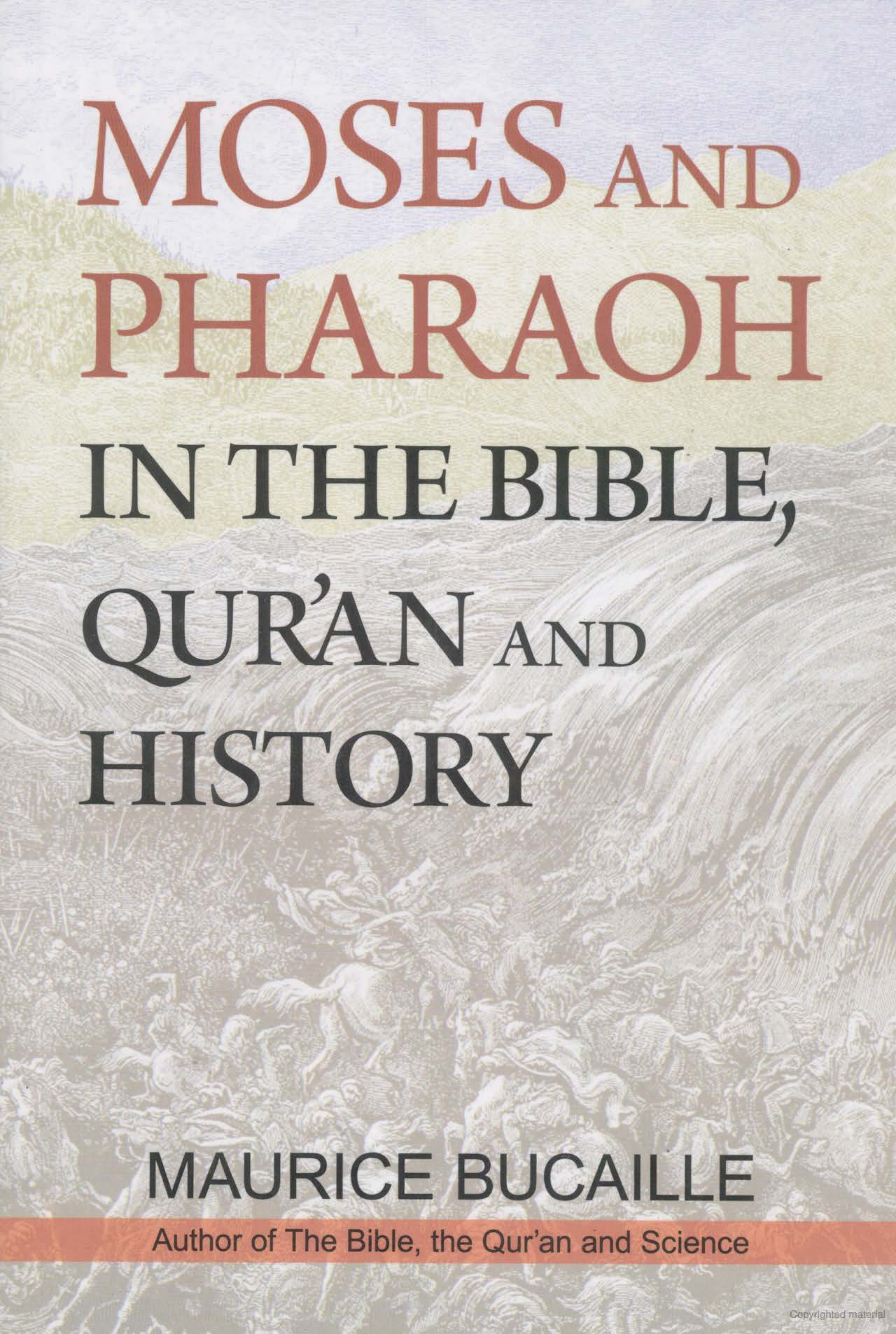


The background of the book cover is a detailed, monochromatic illustration in shades of teal and green. It depicts a dramatic scene where a large body of water, representing the Red Sea, is being parted by a massive, towering wall of water. In the foreground, a large crowd of people is shown, many on horseback, appearing to be fleeing or following the path of the parted sea. The sky above the water is a pale blue with soft, wispy clouds. The overall style is reminiscent of a classic religious painting or a detailed woodcut.

MOSES AND PHARAOH IN THE BIBLE, QUR'AN AND HISTORY

MAURICE BUCAILLE

Author of The Bible, the Qur'an and Science

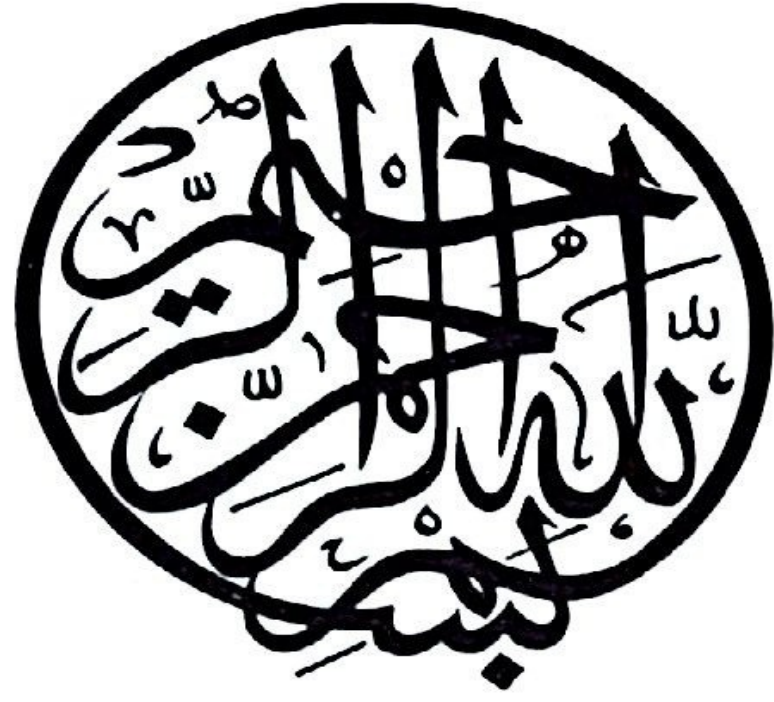
The background of the book cover is a detailed, sepia-toned illustration. It depicts a dramatic scene where a large body of water, presumably the Red Sea, is being parted by a massive, towering wall of water on both sides. In the center, a path of dry ground is visible, where a large crowd of people and many horses are walking. The figures are small in comparison to the immense scale of the parted sea, emphasizing the miraculous nature of the event. The sky above the sea is a pale, hazy blue.

MOSES AND PHARAOH IN THE BIBLE, QUR'AN AND HISTORY

MAURICE BUCAILLE

Author of The Bible, the Qur'an and Science

Maurice Bucaille, born in 1920, former chief of the Surgical Clinic, University of Paris, has been for a long time deeply interested in the correspondences between the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and modern secular knowledge. He is author of the bestseller *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (1976). His classical studies of the scriptural languages, including literary Arabic, in association with his knowledge of hieroglyphics, have allowed him to hold a multidisciplinary inquiry, in which his personal contribution as a medical doctor has produced conclusive arguments. His work, *Mummies of the Pharaohs—Modern Medical Investigations* (1987), won a History Prize from the Académie Française and another prize from the French National Academy of Medicine.



MOSES AND PHARAOH

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MAURICE BUCAILLE

Islamic Book Trust
Kuala Lumpur

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The Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea [Gustav Doré].

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Introduction

The Holy Scriptures of the three monotheistic religions relate events which happened after Abraham instituted the belief in one unique God. These events, whose main aspects are shared by the Bible and the Qur'an, have a special significance when they concern the period of Moses, who, as an apostle of Monotheism, rose up against the despotic authority of "Pharaoh," a symbol of polytheism and an oppressor of the Hebrews. Thus, their history in Egypt, narrated by the Holy Scriptures, is the topic which reveals the greatest number of aspects shared by the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities.

This common history began when the family of Jacob, grandson of Abraham, settled in Egypt, where they were reunited after their separation from Joseph. For he, after having involuntarily endured cruel circumstances, had dwelled in this country a long time before becoming an important administrator. All this happened in a period of Egyptian history when the rulers of the country were not traditional monarchs, but invaders controlling most of Egypt. These rulers were more favorable to foreigners than the previous autochthonous sovereigns, allowing the Israelite community to be more easily integrated, at least for a certain period of time. But when the successors to the previous rulers, who had been driven back to the South, progressively acquired control of the prosperous lands of the North, the community of Hebrews who had settled in this part of Egypt were finally greatly afflicted by the change in ruler. After the happy times, there occurred a painful enslavement. Then the Hebrew community longed to be free, regain physical and spiritual liberties and return to the land of their ancestors; the Exodus from Egypt, conducted by Moses, allowed such achievements.

Therefore, it is easy to understand that the Exodus took a very important place in the history of Judaism; its yearly commemoration, from the beginning, was ritually celebrated with a special solemnity that suited its historical and religious significance. Later on, the Prophets, despite their Israelite descent, did not pronounce their teachings only for the education of the descendants of Abraham. Their teachings were ecumenical. For Christians, they were the messengers of divine precepts, before God gave a mission to one of them, Jesus, in order to promote a

New Alliance. The last stage is the advent of Islam, continuing this series of messages: the Qur'an evokes Abraham, Moses, the Prophets and Jesus in numerous pages of its text and with many details, emphasizing the spiritual roots of Monotheism. Unfortunately, this fact is very often forgotten in the West by many people, despite the development of Western culture; moreover, it may be deliberately overshadowed thanks to the false assertions by those whose aim is to lead people to believe that God for the Muslims is not the same as God for the Jews or the Christians.

Consequently, when one lacks prejudice, a comparative study of the biblical and Qur'anic narrations concerning the history of the descendants of Jacob-Israel, from Joseph to the Exodus, brings forth information which reveals correspondences as well as discordance between both Scriptures. We will later see the importance of clarifying the facts concerning these aspects.

As to the documentation about the stay in Egypt of the Hebrews and Moses, the sources at first were almost exclusively the Holy Scriptures, since a book like *Judaic Antiquity* by Flavius Josephus (1st century B.C.) only provided data of the last centuries before Christ, and his sources were mainly biblical. Thus, the interest lies in an attempt to find documentation outside the Holy Scriptures, since their teachings are not able, by themselves, to give the details which might locate in time the events they relate. In fact, before modern times, how could one have suggested precisely placing the religious events in an Egyptian history which was then badly known?

So, for many centuries, historical knowledge was poor. One may quote: voyages related by Herodotus (5th century B.C.), Diodorus of Sicily (1st century B.C.), Germanicus—related in the *Annals* by Tacitus (Germanicus visited Egypt at the time of Jesus)—scattered documents of the Ptolemaic period, like the lists of kings of Egypt by Manetho (3rd century B.C.) quoted by Flavius Josephus. Therefore, the books of the Bible and additional commentaries were the main sources of information about ancient Egypt for a long time. Later on, the Christian missionaries carried out inquiries whose results were not unimportant in their time. Following the stays in the country of the first archaeologists (17th and 18th centuries) the main surge of historical knowledge dates back to the Expedition in Egypt of Napoleon Bonaparte (1798). For the latter was accompanied by a cohort of young scientists; their findings

were published in the famous book *Description of Egypt*. Such was the prelude to the works of Champollion and his deciphering of hieroglyphs.

Today, the positioning in history of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt has not only benefitted from the classical archaeological investigations and linguistic knowledge, but, in addition, from discoveries in other disciplines which were promoted by researchers who worked outside the field of classical Egyptology. When the former's results were corroborated with the teachings of the latter, they opened new horizons for historical precision.

Nevertheless, long before the teachings of modern Egyptology and its recent correlative developments, the ancient editions of the Bible gave some useful information. Contrary to modern editions that modify the orthography of certain names, the perfect conservation in the past of original names must be emphasized, for it had happy consequences. In the last chapter of the biblical part of the present work, I shall evoke how Champollion was able to take advantage of the orthography "RAMESES," naming the city built by the enslaved Hebrews, in the editions of the Bible that had appeared in his time.

Today, the name of this king is unfortunately written "RAMSES." The editions of the Bible which appeared in the 17th or the 18th centuries in France, as well the old Latin "Vulgate," contained the accurate transliteration of the hieroglyphic name. When, in 1822, Champollion saw this hieroglyph for the first time, he was able to read it in a flash and to decipher the key of the old Egyptian language. In this way, the biblical name, quite indirectly, led to the blossoming of modern knowledge concerning ancient Egypt through the understanding of hieroglyphs. I am unaware, however, of any study carried out by an Egyptologist who has emphasized this fact, which is clearly deduced from the writings of Champollion himself. There are authors who consider the quotation of the Bible from this perspective to be puerile—its content being labeled historically unreliable—while the hieroglyphic data cannot be doubted.

It is a fact that we must question the value of certain deductions concerning the history of the Hebrews that would be drawn exclusively from the biblical teachings; the Holy Scriptures cannot, by themselves, establish this history with complete accuracy. For example, numerous commentators on the Bible had suggested that, if a major event, like the Exodus, might have been located in time, it would be easy to deduce the

date of the entry into Egypt, through a subtraction involving the duration of the stay there. Unfortunately, certain books of the Bible contain teachings about the date of the entry which contradict others about the duration of the stay.

One cannot level reproaches at the old commentators who did not have at their disposal the data we today possess. Nevertheless, their lack of critical thinking is obvious: by comparing contradictory biblical data, they might have realized that their hypotheses were very fragile. The gathering of multiple secular data cannot help but discover incompatibilities which were aroused due to the use of incomplete critique.

If one had taken only such contradictions into account, one would have easily succumbed to the temptation to consider that the biblical narrations express mere myths: unfortunately, in our days, more and more people have taken the plunge. It would be more reasonable to try to detect the degree of historical authenticity of the related events in the light of modern secular knowledge, when one is assured—through a careful study—that the data of the latter are well established for every stage of the history which is submitted to the corroboration. The mistakes have been numerous when authors only took a major event (like the Exodus) into consideration, supposedly located it in time and drew conclusions about other episodes. By doing so, many errors have been made; for example, some authors made inferences from the excavations on the site of Jericho—whose results now appear to be without significance to this point—or from an absolutely illogical interpretation of the hieroglyphic word “*Israil*” that was engraved on the famous *Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah’s Reign* (Merenptah was the successor of Ramesses II).

Another cause of error is to accept the oral traditions quite unservedly. For example, while the Bible teaches that the duration of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt was 430 years, there is a tradition whose metaphorical interpretation had led some to suggest a stay of 210 years. Consequently, in the first case, the Exodus is said to have occurred during the 13th century B.C., and in the second during the 15th century B.C. Another example: the entry into Egypt is almost unanimously supposed to have taken place during the 17th century B.C., while a tradition supposing that the Hebrews had built the great Pyramids of Egypt (they date back to the 27th or 26th century B.C.) would lead one to think

that the event had happened more than one millennium earlier; the latter deduction is untenable.

Unfortunately, certain commentators are attached to the defense of traditions to such an extent that some of them do not take firmly established data of history into the slightest account. Thus, a well-known specialist in the history of ancient Israel, who holds that the Exodus occurred during the 15th century B.C., is naturally obliged to admit that the Bible suggests the impossibility of this event before the reign of one of the Ramesses. Since Egyptology undoubtedly has established that—among eleven “Ramesses” of the 19th and 20th dynasties—the first so-named was king of Egypt during the last years of the 14th century B.C., the thesis of this author is untenable. Nevertheless, for him, this is not a valid objection: why could not a “Ramesses” unknown to historians have reigned before...?

Among the statements that cannot be defended about the Exodus, we must mention what was held concerning the crossing of the whole width of the Red Sea. We will emphasize the fact that, when the teachings of the Bible are logically examined, such a long route could not have been taken by the fleeing Hebrews.

I cannot refrain from discussing certain passages of the Bible which are not tenable when one possesses a critical mind. I take the liberty of doing so with regard to several statements that seem to be particularly untenable. For instance, can we believe that 600,000 men with their families took flight en masse from Egypt, led by Moses, when such a considerable crowd would have, in all likelihood, exceeded the population of the whole country at the time? Perhaps such an assertion suggested itself to a biblical writer whose aim was to magnify the event by means of figures.

Statements of this kind call attention to the history of the biblical texts, a complex history that I shall try to summarize. When one is objective, the awareness of this history shows that the lack of authenticity of certain scriptural narrations may be easily explainable. Such a reflection—for those who have no preconceived ideas—is far from leading one to relegate all the biblical statements to the field of mythology. On the contrary, when a small number of assertions of this kind are put aside—because they are in contradiction with historical data—there

remain teachings that appear in close harmony with history. Consequently, one cannot take literally all that one reads in the Old Testament. We must remember that the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was so wise regarding this point as to mention, in its document concerning "The Revelation," that the books of this part of the Bible, besides divine teachings, may contain "imperfect and obsolete matters." The document was ratified almost unanimously. It seems, nevertheless, to have shocked numerous believers who, in the past, had been educated on the basic principle according to which the Bible is the "Word of God." In my Christian high school, such was the teaching that the boys received.

With regard to the events of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, we have every reason to think that they occurred from the 17th century B.C. to the 13th century B.C. In order to arrive at such a conclusion, we could not be satisfied by finding several apparent correspondences between history and certain religious events of this period which have been studied independently from one another.

A careful study requires that all the events, from the entry into Egypt to the Exodus can be logically inserted in the series of historical changes which secular knowledge has uncovered. When chronological deductions are drawn concerning different stages, in harmony with history, the general conclusions of the study have the maximum chance of being accurate.

In the past, instead of examining the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt in its entirety, the commentators mainly drew their attention to the major terminal event, the Exodus. In order to locate it in time, most of them searched archaeological data related to the settlement of the Hebrews in the Promised Land. By subtracting the 40 years' period of the journey through the wilderness—a biblical chronological evaluation supposed to be beyond question—they thought to be in a position to locate the Exodus in time, and consequently Moses. Unfortunately the results of the excavations in Palestine appear now to be quite inaccurate and totally unreliable. Today, for this reason, we must admit that all the results of the previous attempts of location in time were approximative, most of the authors suggesting quite different periods of the 13th century B.C. Simply because more than three quarters of this century were taken up by the reigns of Ramesses II and Merenptah, to assess—like they did—that the Exodus took place during one of these reigns is not

satisfactory and by this line of reasoning, the problem of the location in time remains no closer to solution. What we know of the events which occurred during the reign of one or the other pharaoh is not usually taken into account by the authors. How could they deduce something—to be compared with history—concerning Moses, his birth, his education in Egypt, his long life which was interrupted by an exile from this country, and his later return, before the Exodus, from such a fragile background premise?

Twenty years ago, the question was still: who was the pharaoh of the Exodus, the pharaoh who lost his life during the pursuit of the Hebrews? Then, I wondered if it might be advisable and profitable to try to uncover signs of the participation, or the impossibility of participation, in the Exodus of the kings of Egypt who reigned during this century. A way was offered to the researcher: the investigation of their mummies. For me, it was clear that the Bible strongly suggests the death of the pharaoh who pursued the fleeing Hebrews. On the other hand, what I knew of the results of the mummification process in ancient Egypt led me to think of the interest of such a research endeavor. As a surgeon, it would be easy for me to apply modern medical investigative techniques to the mummies of the kings who had reigned during the 13th century B.C., which were kept at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. If their examination led to the discovery of detectable signs, it might be possible to find out how these pharaohs ended their days. Of course, such research implied carrying it out at Cairo, and that it would be permitted....

Since I am not a specialized researcher in Egyptology, very likely I would never have been fortunate enough to be allowed to conduct it without the occurrence, in 1974, of an event having absolutely no connection with this purpose. The latter was strictly connected with my medical practice. Then, I had the opportunity at that time, in Paris, to present my plan to the First Lady of Egypt, the wife of President Sadat, emphasizing its interest, with a view to having a better knowledge of the history of the Hebrews; the identity of the pharaoh of the Exodus was then still in discussion. Several months later, by the kind permission of President Sadat, the first investigations began in the Mummies Room of the Museum with the participation of Egyptian collaborators. Later, a dozen other collaborators belonging to diverse medical disciplines were associated with the research. The scope of the investigations was more

extensive than the previous American explorations of mummies, which had been performed essentially by the use of X-rays.

The first results were reported in 1976 in my book, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (French edition published by Seghers, Paris) and, at the same time, to the French National Academy of Medicine and other learned societies, among them the French Society of Forensic Medicine. The investigations into the causes of death had particularly attracted the attention of two of my collaborators: Professor F. Ceccaldi, Head of the Police Forensic Laboratory in Paris, and his Assistant at that time, Professor M. Durigon. Later on, more detailed results were reported in my book, *Les Momies des Pharaons et la Médecine* (Librairie Séguier, publisher, Paris, 1987). This edition won a 1988 History Prize from the Académie Française; after its translation to English, it was published by St. Martin's Press, New York, in 1990, under the title: *Mummies of the Pharaohs: Modern Medical Investigations*.

In order to obtain comparative data concerning certain medical findings, we extended the research to mummies of the kings of Egypt who reigned during other periods. The research put us in a position to bring data concerning certain points to light, in such a way that today many hypotheses suggested by biblical commentators before 1976 cannot be upheld. As far as the Exodus is concerned, for example, as I will emphasize in chapter 9, Ramesses II could not have been in a position to be at the head of the Egyptian army pursuing the Hebrews. Since he was suffering from a disease which rendered him disabled—as shown by X-rays—he would not have been able to participate in the pursuit. Ramesses II could not have played the least part in the Exodus. On the other hand, we may state without reservation that his successor, Merenptah, was obviously injured by multiple blows resulting in severe lesions which were rapidly or instantaneously lethal. Without excluding death in water, emphasized by commentators of the Scriptures, the medical study has shown that the wounds were provoked by considerable violence. At this point, we must remember that the Bible teaches us that the charioteers pursuing the Hebrews were overthrown in the water, into which they went down like “stones” or “lead” (Chapters XIV and XV of the book of Exodus). Today, concerning this aspect of the Exodus, the medical data exactly corroborate details of the biblical teachings; these medical data were not known before 1976.

More recently, in 1987, an archaeological finding of the utmost interest, as far as the history of the Hebrews is concerned, was published by the Biblical Institute of the Vatican, Rome, in the review, *Orientalia*. Professor J. Leclant, from the Collège de France, Paris, in his yearly summary of archaeological findings in Egypt, reported that the German Archaeologists of the Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim, had excavated the site of the city named "Pi-Ramesses" in the Bible. The excavations had begun in 1980 in the Nile Delta, where the city of Pi-Ramesses was built by the enslaved Hebrews, according to the Bible. Having discovered vestiges on which the name of the king, Sethos I, had been engraved, the German archaeologists had, using this, suggested that the beginning of the building of the city dated back to the reign of this pharaoh, around 1300 B.C. Thereafter the city became the northern capital of his son and successor, Ramesses II. This finding led us to refer to a passage of the Bible which relates this construction in a description of the enslavement, including the narration of the birth of Moses.

In the present work, we shall mention the chronological correspondences between this detail and the biblical teachings concerning the life of Moses, the death of an Egyptian king during his exile and his old age before the Exodus: between all these facts of the biblical narration and the events of Egyptian history, we discover many parallelisms.

So, data from sources of secular knowledge which are so widely diverse as medicine and archaeology were able to yield indirect chronological deductions in close conformity to one another. Moreover, after we had obtained this result about the 13th century B.C., we succeeded in completing the correspondence as to the insertion in history of the stay of the Hebrews in its entirety, i.e., the period of time which had elapsed from the entry into Egypt, under the rule of the Hyksos, to the Exodus, the final event of Merenptah's reign: the 430 years of the stay in Egypt, according to the Bible, appear in harmony with the historical data concerning both political events.

The last point that had to be cleared up was the problem of the concordance of the thesis which is held in the present work with some data from several Egyptian documents. These documents are rare, but they do exist, notwithstanding that certain authors claimed that the history of the Hebrews in Egypt left no trace in the Egyptian texts, since the Scriptural narrations concerning the Hebrews are nothing more than legends.

The truth lies in the fact that there are texts which contain hieroglyphic names like "*Israil*," "*Jacob*" and a possible mis-transliteration of the word 'Hebrew' as "*Apiru*" in old Egyptian. Each of these words will be discussed in the corresponding chapter. It will be stated that, in the old Egyptian texts, there exist: a mention of the name of Jacob in the titulary of a Hyksos king of the middle of the 17th century B.C., numerous mentions of the "*Apiru*" as being forced laborers—a word which might designate enslaved Hebrews or other slaves, as well—a mention of "*Israil*," as a human community not possessing a land and having lost its "posterity seed" during the reign of Merenptah. Each of these hieroglyphic words appears with a meaning in harmony with events related in the Bible and with precise chronological correspondence between them and historical data located in the same time. The commentators have, until now, given diverse opinions concerning them, which might be revised in the light of what is revealed by recent secular knowledge.

The first part of the present work refers to the Bible. Among the teachings of the Bible, I have tried to distinguish between what is not decisive with a view to strictly establishing chronological correspondences and what seems to me to be crucial in a corroboration with modern knowledge whose aim is to locate the events in time. It appears to me that five biblical teachings might be described as being, in themselves, able to contribute to the establishment of a perfectly coherent chronological correspondence between the teachings and secular knowledge. In the Bible, they are concisely expressed, to such an extent that we might give an account of them in 15 lines.

The second part of the present work deals with the Qur'anic narrations concerning the events of the stay of the Hebrews; the same criteria are used in corroboration with the secular data. For each stage of the stay in Egypt, a parallel study of the biblical and Qur'anic texts is made, mentioning the particularities of one and the other. At first, we must note that none of the events related in the Bible and considered to be crucial for the chronological insertion is found in the Qur'an. Consequently, if we had absolutely no knowledge of the five biblical passages that are evoked above, an attempt of location in time of the history of the Hebrews, like the Qur'an narrates it, would have been unsuccessful.

Does this mean that the Qur'an does not contain teachings which are full of interest when one corroborates them with the diverse data of secular knowledge related to the same religious events? Not at all.

On the contrary, the second part of the present work will show that one cannot find in the Qur'an several biblical assertions whose unlikelihood or obvious incompatibility with modern secular data is demonstrated. Moreover, some inaccuracies in the Bible—that are supposed to have been, unfortunately, introduced by certain writers of the Bible in order to give special characteristics to certain events—are not found in the Qur'an: the latter relates them with highly significant details which appear in close conformity with the knowledge of our days.

I imagine that such findings might bring some surprise. Certain results of the comparison of both texts are even more stupefying. So, I have been very much impressed by what the Qur'an teaches us about the destiny—not mentioned in the Bible—of the body of the pharaoh who perished in the Exodus. Since we have every reason to think that the mummy discovered in 1898 belonged to Merenptah, it is of the utmost interest to refer to the Qur'anic text which had predicted its future during the 7th century A.D. Also, how can we explain that the Qur'an mentions the name of a person closely associated to Pharaoh, of which an accurate transliteration of the hieroglyphics is given in Arabic, while it is not, of course, present in the Bible. Such a finding cannot receive a human explanation according to what we know of the Old Egyptian in our days, and what the men knew of this language through the past centuries.

The present work does not deal with theoretical or speculative views; it copes with facts. Any objective researcher who wants to master the differences between both Scriptures may test the accuracy of what is emphasized through the data of secular knowledge. When one possesses the means, given by the latter, posing the question of the compatibility of the scriptural teachings with modern knowledge is commanded by a quite natural way of thinking, logical reasoning. The results of the study of the events here concerned not only illuminate the stages of this long history, but provide us with examples of the interest of searching for compatibility. Finally, how could one uphold that the Scriptural narrations of this period, so rich in consequences for human history, only contain legends?

Part One

The Bible

MOSES AND PHARAOH

...perspicuum est, in questionibus rei historicae, ... historiae testimonia valere prae ceteris, eaque esse quam studiosissime et conquirenda et excutienda ... Quapropter Scripturae sacrae doctori cognitio naturalium rerum bono erit subsidio, quo huius quoque modi captiones in divinos Libros instructas facilius detegat et refellat.

Litterae Encyclicae S.S.D.N. Leonis PP. XIII

De studiis Scripturae Sacrae

Providentissimus Deus

...it is obvious that, when a historical matter is concerned... the value of the historical testimonies is more eminent than all the others; these testimonies must be searched for with the maximum of care... Consequently, the awareness of the occurrences will bring an efficient help to any teacher of the Holy Scripture; through the latter, indeed, he will be in a better position to disclose and disprove any kind of sophisms put forward in a debate against the Holy Books.

Extract From The Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII

Providentissimus Deus; The Study of the Holy Scripture

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1. History of the Biblical Texts: Legitimization of the Search for Correspondences with History

Our aim is to insert religious events in history, as far as one is able to according to our knowledge. Our research is limited to the events as they are narrated by the Holy Scriptures, without any intent to try to enlighten on any spiritual aspect. Nonetheless, a precise location in time of a religious event may contribute to revealing data that is useful in clarifying such aspects. In this way, certain theses concerning the alleged influence of Akhenaten upon Moses—and vice versa—became totally unlikely, when it was established that a period of time had elapsed between the two of them which made it impossible that interferences of this kind might have played a part. The insertion of the life of Moses into history appears of great interest from this point of view.

Such research would be easier, if we only had a single unique text of the Bible, without variations. Unfortunately, there are many versions which have been published in the Christian world, and the text that we possess today is considered as having drawn from several versions. Only a “middle of the road” text can be used. Consequently, when we compare the narrations with secular knowledge, some divergences are found. The real causes of their existence are explained by the history of the biblical texts, of which a summary will be given.

The greater part of the modern text of the Bible—as far as the Old Testament is concerned—is based on the Masoretic text, i.e., the Hebrew text whose passages were completed or corrected by extracts from the Greek version which is called “Septuagint,” for it was written by seventy Jewish authors at Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (287-247 B.C.). This text was accepted by the Evangelists and the first Christians. During the centuries which followed, the “Fathers,” who were the early Christian writers, discussed parts of this text: then, new versions were written in Greek, like the *Codex Vaticanus*, kept at the Vatican, and the *Codex Sinaiticus*, today at the British Museum, London, both dating back to the 4th century A.D. About one century later, Saint Jerome ordered the use of the Hebrew text to produce a Latin version, which was called the “Vulgate” and became the authorized version of the Roman Catholic Church. Many other versions were

written, among them the Aramaic and Syriac (Peschitta) which are more or less complete.

The Hebrew text was composed after oral tradition had transmitted the narrations of the events of the religious history during many centuries. One must admire that memory of the events was able to retain the occurrences when one is aware of the time that elapsed between the events and the writing of the texts. At least, regarding the main facts which will be corroborated by secular knowledge in our days, we note that there is not a great difference—except in details—between the Hebrew text we now possess, like the authorized version of the Rabbinate, and the Septuagint, the Greek version of the 3rd century B.C.

Apart from the experts, generally, there is a great ignorance about the periods when the texts of the Hebrew version were composed. Many people do not know that the basic text in this language, the Masoretic one, dates back to 820-850 A.D., and that it contained only the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament). The present printed versions are published in conformity with the edition of 1524 by Jacob ben Hayyim which appeared in Venetia (Italy). In addition, there were other versions whose basis was not the Masoretic text. The discoveries made from 1947, in the Qumran Caves in Palestine, of texts which date back to the 1st century A.D., showed only several variations, as far as we know today. There is no text that would be more ancient than the Septuagint (3rd century B.C.) which might give useful teachings about the events that are related here and concern what occurred between the 17th and the 13th centuries B.C.

What are the opinions of the Christian commentators about the multiplicity of texts, which is readily admitted today, in contrast to what was accepted before? This multiplicity is full of consequences regarding the historical value of certain texts, in connection with the existence of writings intermediate in time between the occurrence of the events and the definitive approval of a textual tradition.

Not being an expert on this point, I should like to base my remarks on the conclusions of specialists of biblical criticism, like the Christian commentators of the *French Ecumenical Translation of the Bible*, published by Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, first edition, 1975. More than one hundred Roman Catholic and Protestant exegetes participated

in the editing of this work. They wrote what follows in pages 10 and 11 of the Introduction:

The books of the Bible were composed by authors or writers who were considered to be transmitting the word of God to their people.... A part of their writings was inspired by the traditions of their community. Before their final recording, what they had composed was communicated to the members of the latter, so that their Scriptures wear the marks of the reactions of their readers. These marks are made of changes in the texts, notices and even more or less complete recastings.... The most recent books may be the result of new interpretation and updating of more ancient books.

In this way, the commentators admit the existence of deliberate changes over the course of time by revisers who had special reasons for modifying a text or adding precise details that appeared to be advisable. Consequently, the texts that we possess in our days may contain details or passages which are the result of choices that were made by men, as the most appropriate for the specific use of their community.

Until the 17th century A.D., the texts that narrate the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt were unanimously considered to have been written by Moses himself. They formed the collection of books which received the Hebrew name of "The five books of the Torah" or "Law" or "Pentateuch." These five books are: Genesis, relating to the events from the Creation to the death of Joseph, son of Jacob; Exodus, containing most of the teachings concerning Moses and the departure of the Israelites from Egypt; Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, collections of laws and narrations of the journey through the wilderness and death of Moses.

How was this collection of texts composed through the centuries? A good general view of the history of the texts seems to have been given by E. Jacob, Professor at the University of Strasbourg (France) in his book *The Old Testament* (Presses Universitaires de France, Publisher, Paris, 1970, *Que sais-je?* collection). E. Jacob is somewhat skeptical about the historicity of the events as they are narrated. He emphasizes that there

was at first a folk tradition that relied entirely upon human memory as passed on through the families or religious authorities:

It is probable that what the Old Testament narrates about Moses and the patriarchs only roughly corresponds to the succession of historical facts. The narrators, however, even at the stage of oral transmission, were able to bring into play such grace and imagination to blend between them highly varied episodes, that when all is said and done, they were able to present as a history that was fairly credible to critical thinkers what happened at the beginning of humanity and the world.

After the Jewish people settled in Canaan at the beginning of the 12th century B.C., writing was used. Then, there was a concern to keep a large written record of contract letters, lists of personalities (judges, high city officials, genealogic tables), lists of offerings and plunder. In this way, archives were created which provided documentation for the later editing of definitive versions resulting in the books we have today.

In his "General Introduction to the Pentateuch," for the publication of the Bible in separate volumes edited by the Biblical School of Jerusalem (Editions du Cerf, publisher, Paris, 1962), Father de Vaux, Director of this school, has clearly explained the complexity of the sources at the origin of the definitive texts. He has separated and classified the following sources:

- the Yahvist version situated in the 9th century B.C. (origin: Kingdom of Judah),
- the Elohist version, probably a little more recent (origin: Kingdom of Israel),
- Deuteronomy, from the 8th century B.C. for some (E. Jacob), from the time of Josiah (7th century B.C.) for Father de Vaux
- the Sacerdotal version from the period of the Exile in Babylon or just after the Exile (6th century B.C.).

Israeli experts in biblical criticism note that the Jewish tradition upholds the thesis that Moses had composed the Pentateuch by himself. Today, nevertheless, after the works of Julius Wellhausen (1874), one

admits the existence of separate writers for the Yahvist, Elohist and Sacerdotal versions and Deuteronomy: "All these versions would have been revised after the Exile." (Professor G. Nahon)

As to the narrations of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, they were undoubtedly written during a period of three centuries; moreover, each of their main sources is heterogenous. In 1941, A. Lods was able to distinguish 3 sources for the Yahvist version, 4 for the Elohist version, 6 for Deuteronomy and 9 for the Sacerdotal version, without taking into account what was added by 8 writers. The multiplicity of the sources explains the existence of discrepancies. Father de Vaux gives examples of the interweaving of elements coming from diverse versions: in addition to the disagreements evoked in this book's Introduction, there is the well-known overlap of the events narrated concerning Joseph and the plagues of Egypt. Consequently, certain details of these chapters reveal contradictions and impossibilities. Nevertheless, such defects could not lead one to deny any value for teaching to biblical statements, when they perfectly agree with historical facts and archaeological findings which allow discovery of indisputable data, or with mentions in the hieroglyphic texts which corroborate certain narrations of the Holy Scriptures.

Besides the Pentateuch, there are other books of the Bible which, through statements concerning events other than the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, contain chronological data about the former that situate them in relation to the alleged time of the Exodus. So, it may bring to light contradictions with teachings extracted from versions that preceded them. Such is the case of the book of I Kings and the book of Judges. Their references about the time of the Exodus cannot be accepted, as will be further explained.

In the Christian world, until the 17th century, Moses was considered as being the author of the Pentateuch. Then an objection was raised to this point. Previously, nobody could uphold a thesis different from what Paul deduced from the words of Jesus himself about Moses (Gospel of John, 5:46-47) and from what Paul had declared in his letter to the Romans (10:5): "Moses writes that the man who practises the righteousness...." When Father Richard Simon, Member of the Oratory, published *Critical History of the Old Testament*, he was considered as having defied the statements of Jesus and Paul: "Moses writes...." For, he had emphasized the chronological difficulties, the repetitions, the

confusion of the stories and stylistic differences in the Pentateuch. The book caused a scandal. Bossuet (the famous Bishop) was the head of those who got indignant about what he had termed “an amount of irreligiousness and a fortification in favor of the licentiousness.” As a result, the book was destroyed; Father Simon was expelled from the Society of the Oratory; he vainly tried to defend his thesis through an intensive work but sadly ended his life in a village of Normandy; his last work, a translation of the New Testament, had been forbidden and all the means of censorship used against him by the Archbishop of Paris. Today, Father R. Simon is considered as having been the one to inject new life into the study of the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, it was not until 1753 that a new critical study of the biblical text had really appeared; it was not the work of a member of the Church—a medical doctor had promoted it!

Jean Astruc was a physician, from the University of Paris, private doctor of King Louis XV. 80 years after Richard Simon, he studied the book of Genesis through a critical reasoning and published in 1753 his *Conjectures on the Original Writings Which It Appears Moses Used To Compose the Book of Genesis*. What John Astruc brought to modern biblical studies had so much value that the Director of the Biblical School of Jerusalem, Father de Vaux, in his Introduction to the translation of the book of Genesis in 1963, wrote that John Astruc must be regarded as the “inventor” of the “Documental Theory” or “Theory of the Sources” for the Pentateuch, since he demonstrated their multiplicity.

One might think that the acknowledgement of this disparity of elements used in the composition of the texts could lead any impartial exegete to distinguish between what was corroborated by secular knowledge and what was not, all that with a view to discovery and emphasis of the historical interest of a scriptural teaching.

Sometimes, this interest is stressed, like by Father de Vaux in his comments on the book of Genesis: “The biblical narrations concerning the patriarchs relate true events; they should not be suspected when they are corroborated by history and archacology.” (p.34) Unfortunately, in the page which follows, one can read that, for this exegete, as far as the origins of the world and Man are concerned, the data of geology, paleontology or prehistory are not considered as having any value, so much so that their use is severely condemned by the same author: “If one had

to confront the Bible with data of these sciences, the result would be an unreal conflict or an artificial concordance" (in French: "*concordisme factice*"). The contradiction is obvious between the two points and the author seems to dread finding out about certain attempts at comparison between the Bible and science. Such an unmoving attitude may have regrettable consequences, as when, half a century ago, Father Teilhard de Chardin, who showed the compatibility of his belief in the God Creator with his findings in the field of paleontology, was obliged to keep silent, because his search for correspondences was not accepted by Christian authorities.

These dismissals of logical thinking suggest many questions about the concept of the usefulness of secular knowledge juxtaposed to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, particularly when this concept is expressed by religious authorities of high rank. In a bulletin edited by a Vatican Institute in 1985, the part that might be played by logical thought was denounced, by emphasizing "the evil that afflicted the Christian thought at the end of the last century, being the search for correspondences" (between Holy Scriptures and secular knowledge). The latter was described as:

...an excessive attempt to put in accord two parts of reality, i.e., the religious truth and the scientific truth, both of which concern autonomous and independent fields. Consequently, the danger of opposing them is as great as the danger of putting them in accord.

These lines were written about one of my works which was severely criticized for my search for correspondences between the Holy Scriptures and secular knowledge, from a general point of view and particularly regarding my comments on the Qur'an. The author of this judgment belonged to the Vatican Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (P.I.S.A.I.). More recently, the review *Islamo-Christiana*, edited by the same Institute, expressed an even more radical opinion about the use of secular knowledge for this same purpose, the author stating that "he was personally convinced of the absurdity of any search for correspondences, when one studies the Bible or the Qur'an." (*Islamo-Christiana*, 1990, No.15,

pp. 264-265) This method, considered as “dangerous” in 1985 and “absurd” in 1990—how will it be labelled in reviews of the present work?

Thank heaven, there are other Christian thinkers whose opinions concerning the same topic are absolutely different when they draw their attention to the use that the modern man is able to make of his reasoning and of secular knowledge in a reflection about the Scriptures.

In France, during recent years, the book *God and Science* (*Dieu et la Science*) by Professor Jean Guitton and I. and G. Bogdanov, (Grasset, publisher, Paris, 1991) became a best-seller. It deals with questions about the existence of God at first, but for a long while, J. Guitton emphasizes the interest of logical reasoning and secular knowledge for the study of the Bible, similar to that evoked by this book.

J. Guitton is very well known in France as a member of the Académie Française and as having been a friend of the late Pope Paul VI and the only layman who was invited to speak before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). He wrote his memoirs in 1988, entitled *A Century, a Life* (*Un siècle, une vie*), published by R. Laffont, Paris. In this book, he comes back to what he had previously said about his thought as a young philosopher during the years preceding the Second World War, by repeatedly evoking what he wrote in another book that appeared half a century ago.

Among many other studies, his book *Portrait of Mr. Pouget* (*Portrait de Mr. Pouget*) (Desclée de Brouwer, publisher, Paris, 1941), is considered by the author to be the most important of all of them. He has written about this book: “If my works had to be destroyed except one, I should like that one would preserve this book. It was the first that I wrote; it would have been better for me to end up in writing it.”

Mr. Pouget was a priest, member of the Lazarist Society, who was professor in a seminary in Paris between 1888 and 1905 and considered as a “well of erudition,” despite his becoming progressively blind. He was a spiritual guide for J. Guitton. In the chapter of the memoirs of the latter devoted to Mr. Pouget, the author has quoted many statements by this priest: “Reason alone is governing my thought.... The true defense of religion is the use of a critical approach.... The rational methods in our studies are necessary for all of us and for everything....” J. Guitton perceived that these general principles could bring great benefit to the

attempt to strengthen the Faith, hoping that, "in the future, such a way of thinking might be useful to a new discovery of the Faith."

Through the book by J. Guitton, who was then a witness, one knows something about the unique meeting of Mr. Pouget and H. Bergson in 1933 and what the latter said to the priest:

It would be highly desirable to study many important questions, particularly what concerns the Bible, the new views, without preconceived ideas, leaving apart the ancient speculative theories and the statements of those who claim to know, by only holding one's attention to the facts. For, it is a deplorable method when one studies a question by having the only care of demonstrating something and showing that Mr. So-and-So is wrong.... It seems to me that, until now, the religious questions have not been studied in such a spirit.

This old book by J. Guitton was published during the Second World War when the author was prisoner, i.e., in very bad conditions for promoting these ideas. Nevertheless, eminent personalities at the time stated their admiration for this courageous priest, emphasizing their interest in the use of reason, at a time when a crisis in the Christian world began to be perceived. On the contrary, Mr. Pouget was condemned by high authorities of the Roman Catholic Church to abandon his teaching of the Old Testament, which appeared to them to be dangerous. Moreover, the comments on the New Testament by Mr. Pouget were also condemned, because they were in contradiction with the prevailing opinions of his time.

In spite of this disapproval, as J. Guitton emphasized, very important persons expressed their feelings as H. Bergson had done, among them: Alain, the philosopher, Daniel Halevy, Francois Mauriac and Albert Camus. J. Guitton had expected that this book of his reflections about Mr. Pouget would have the same destiny as a bottle which is thrown into the sea... destined to provoke no favorable reactions, for they would not be in line with the conventional standards of the Church. And, when the memoirs of J. Guitton appeared in 1988, among many comments, as far as I know, only one drew attention to the book about

Mr. Pouget, published in 1941, and emphasized that, since the Pentateuch is a "mosaic of documents," the critical method of the Lazarist priest "had brought an original support able to impress the intelligence in the modern times." After half a century, it appears that a revolution in the way of thinking about these matters has not yet occurred....

Perhaps, nonetheless, in certain facts which quite recently came to widespread knowledge, there is hope of a change coming from the solemn decisions of Pope John Paul II. Would it be possible that they might thwart the trend of opinion condemning any appeal to critical reasoning about the Holy Scriptures, which, as we have seen previously, remains deep-rooted in some circles of the Vatican itself?

In order to have a better understanding of this change, we must know the origin and the development of an extremely severe crisis in the Catholic Church, which begins to be divulged in our days, after having caused many disturbances in recent decades.

It was in connection with the enlightenment by secular knowledge, particularly that of history, of the biblical narrations. The evolution of this crisis shows such a number of contradictions in Papal decisions on the same subject, that one might doubt the likelihood of what will follow, if the documents relating the facts were not rigorously authenticated by the highest authorities.

The first source is a very recent book by Professor J. Guitton, *Portrait of Father Lagrange*; (*Portrait du Père Lagrange*, published by Editions Robert Laffont, Paris, 1992). At first, we are given to know that Pope John Paul II himself asked the author to write it: J. Guitton quotes a paragraph of a letter of the Pope dated December 12, 1990: "The aim of the book that you are writing about Father Lagrange is to prepare his canonization. I put you in charge of this work." The research of J. Guitton has for its main subject the decisive role played by Father Lagrange concerning the study of the Bible in the light of history.

What will follow is not only based on the data of this book, but, in addition, on the contents of a long preface to an edition, dating back to 1966, of the main work of Father Lagrange, *The Historical Method* (*La Methode Historique*, published by Les Editions du Cerf, Paris). The author of the preface is Father de Vaux, then Director of the Biblical School of Jerusalem.

Father Lagrange, a Dominican, had been appointed in 1890 by Pope Leo XIII the founder of this School, which was presented as “a permanent scientific institute” whose aim was to centralize the secular discoveries that might be useful to position the biblical events in history.

He was immediately accused of being responsible for the worst deviancies by the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. For having delivered lectures about his theses—although with an extreme discretion—at the beginning of this century, he immediately brought upon himself the wrath of several religious orders, like the Order of Jesuits: a member of the Society of Jesus wrote a book that severely condemned Father Lagrange. In addition, the General Superior of the Society of Jesus addressed a formal warning to all the members of the Order against the historical method, and, in order to combat the theses of Father Lagrange with more efficiency, the Pontifical Biblical Institute was founded in Jerusalem under the direction of a Jesuit. In his book, J. Guitton has emphasized that the personal hostility of this director against Father Lagrange had led him “to repeat to everybody who could hear it that he will break” his rival of the Biblical School. At the same time, the General Superior of the Dominican Order successively prohibited reprints of a previous limited edition of the above quoted book by Father Lagrange, and ordered him to stop the delivery of lectures in the future.

To the clever moves on the part of the opponents who were at the top of these two religious orders, Pope Pius X added his quite resolute personal action. This Pope was afraid of what was called “modernism”; he considered it to be “heresy” and, in 1910, in a solemn document, called “*Motu Proprio*” in Latin, he ordered every religious teacher to take an oath against modernism and, in 1912, the Pope’s seal was affixed on a decree which prohibited any introduction into the seminaries of the writings of Father Lagrange “even in order to consult them.” All that ended up in the ousting of Father Lagrange from his School. J. Guitton, in deeply distressing terms, relates the end of the life of the persecuted Father: the latter, in 1912, had written to a friend, that, from that time on, he was “a wreckage at the order of his General Superior” (J. Guitton, *op.cit.* p.90). He died in 1938.

Thus, occurring one after another, the approbation of the opposition, incitement to attack and the final condemnation by Pope Pius X has been aimed at a priest who wanted to arouse a revival of credibility

for the biblical narrations, through the use of critical reasoning. Nonetheless, Pope Pius X was canonized by Pope Pius XII: in this way, the persecutor became... a Saint.

Today, as written in the above quoted letter to Professor J. Guitton, Pope John Paul II intends to ordain Father Lagrange as a Saint. This leads J. Guitton to write:

What was condemned as a "heresy" in 1906 is proclaimed as being—now and for the future—the doctrine of the Church and the method to be followed. In other words, those who, in 1906, were "modernists" now appear as having been precursors.

As for Father de Vaux, when he was in 1966 director of the Biblical School of Jerusalem, he had already expressed his view in the above quoted Preface, about the "method of Father Lagrange": "Today, the historical method is the one which is followed by all the exegetes who are working seriously" (quoted by J. Guitton, *op.cit.* p.72).

It is a fact that several chapters of the present work will show that the use of the historical method (unfortunately restricted to partial inquiries) has been unable to position in history certain episodes of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, due to the insufficient search for demonstrative correspondences between the episodes. Nonetheless, the principle of inquiries of this kind is highly valuable and, according to what we know about the painful story of Father Lagrange, one must put the following question: would it be intellectually honest to condemn somebody, who is not an exegete, when he brings results of his personal research which, joined to many other data of secular knowledge, allow an answer, in a positive way, to the question: what are the correspondences of the Holy Scriptures with history?

Note

There is an obvious discordance between the opinion of Father de Vaux about the search for the harmony of the Holy Scriptures and secular knowledge and what he has later written concerning the method of Father Lagrange. We must know that the publication of the first one

had received the “permission of editing” in French from the four hierarchical superiors of the Father in 1951 (June 14 to October 23), during the Pontificate of Pius XII who, in 1954, canonized Pius X, the resolute persecutor of Father Lagrange. As to the quite favorable opinion of Father de Vaux about the excellent use of critical reasoning in the historical method of Father Lagrange, it dates back to 1966. How can such an obvious about-face be explained? Simply by the fact that, between the years 1951 and 1966, more exactly from 1962 to 1965, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council had proclaimed a declaration concerning the Scriptures which had caused a great fuss: the Pope John Paul II, of course, followed its conclusions by legitimizing the theses of Father Lagrange.

2. Entry into Egypt During the Rule of the Hyksos

Every chapter of the present work deals with a period of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, this period being inserted in the history of the country, in a manner as precise as possible. Naturally, the arguments coming from secular knowledge that are put forward for this purpose are not equally viable in determining the various periods concerned. For example, it turned out that our knowledge about the 13th century B.C. could lead us to find more correspondences than could that about the 17th century B.C., which is the period when, in all likelihood, the first Hebrews settled in the Nile delta. Thank heaven, after the collection of arguments concerning the periods of the stay that followed—particularly the time of the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt—the thesis of the beginning of their settlement four centuries earlier is strengthened.

Nevertheless, in favor of this thesis, there are straightaway solid historical propositions, corroborated by the existence of a hieroglyphic document concerning a Hyksos king to whom the name of Jacob is associated.

For a long time, specialists in Egyptology and commentators on the Bible, who did not yet have at their disposal the secular data we today possess, concluded that the settlement in Egypt of Joseph and his family had occurred under the rule of the Hyksos.

Two authors must be quoted regarding what they had suggested from this point of view in the past, more precisely between 1920 and 1960.

Father R.P. Mallon was, as far as I know, one of the most learned members of the Catholic Church, greatly concerned about the search for correspondences between biblical and secular knowledge. His long study, which might have been censured today by those whom I have quoted in the preceding chapter, was, nonetheless, published in 1921 by the Vatican Biblical Institute; numerous pages of his work are devoted to the entry in the Hyksos period into the history of Egypt and to the administration of the country at that time by Joseph. Later, in 1959, Professor Pierre Montet dealt with the same topic in his book, *Egypt and the Bible* (*L'Égypte et la Bible*, published by Delachaux et Niestlé, Neuchâtel (Switzerland)); P. Montet, whose excavations on the site of Tanis had brought to light a considerable amount of data related to the Israelite-Egyptian history, had already stated that there was little chance of error in situating the period of entry in the time of the rule of the

Hyksos, and the settlement, on a land of the Nile delta that the Bible called “land of Ramesses” (through an anachronism). For P. Montet, the acceptance of the Hebrews was in close conformity with the politics of the rulers of Egypt at this time.

Biblical narrations of the history of Joseph and Jacob

The book of Genesis, chapters XXXVII to L (except chapter XXXVIII, devoted to another topic) narrate this history. A summary is given here, details that would not be useful to our purpose were they left out. We note their interest as casual mentions of the life in Egypt: for example, the part played by the dreams, which must be evaluated by taking account of the attitudes of mind that were very common around 37 centuries ago.

The brothers of Joseph were jealous of the preference of their father for him. Being seventeen years old, shepherding the flock with them, he was called by his brothers “the dreamer”; for he had dreams, told them to his brothers, and they hated him all the more. When they were out at pasture with Joseph, they threw him into a pit. Traders who passed by drew Joseph up and afterwards sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. Meanwhile, the brothers of Joseph said to their father that he had been devoured by a wild beast and—as a proof—showed the robe he had worn, which had been stained with blood from an animal.

At Potiphar’s house, of which Joseph became an overseer, the young man was good-looking and his master’s wife cast her eyes upon him. He would not listen to her. One day, she caught him by his garment, but Joseph left his garment in her hand and fled. Potiphar’s wife said that Joseph had insulted her and Joseph was put into prison.

There, Joseph met two of the king’s prisoners, his butler and baker, who also had dreams; Joseph was able to interpret them. One of them later remembers this ability of Joseph after having been liberated from prison; when Pharaoh has dreams, he says to Pharaoh that a young Hebrew in the prison had known how to interpret them.

Then Pharaoh ordered to release Joseph who was able to give him an interpretation of his personal dreams. This suggested to Pharaoh that such capabilities as Joseph had might be useful to the administration of

the country. For the dreams of Pharaoh were related to the organization of the supplies for the country; then, the authorities worried a great deal over these problems, being always threatened with famine. Having deduced that “none is so discreet and wise” as Joseph, the pharaoh decided that Joseph would be over his house and his people, and set him over all the land of Egypt. Joseph, who was thirty, knew how to gather the food supply, storing it up in every city in great abundance. It turned out that the brothers of Joseph came to Egypt in order to buy grain; Joseph was able to recognize them, while they could not imagine that he was their brother.

The Bible narrates that Joseph, in order to lead them to confess their crime against him (the abandonment into a pit), used cunning; it is not necessary at all to detail this for our purposes here.

Chapter XLV of Genesis relates what, in the end, Joseph claimed to his brothers one day: “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” (Genesis 45:3). Then, Joseph invited Jacob and his brothers to settle in Egypt, in the land of “Goshen.”

Thus, the first Hebrews (Jacob, 70 men and, in addition, their wives and children entered into Egypt after Joseph (Genesis 46:27).

And we must note that the Bible says: “Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Ramesses, as Pharaoh commanded.” (Genesis 47:11)

This passage contains two anachronisms about these words: Ramesses and Pharaoh.

- 1) The events related in these chapters cannot have occurred in a time when the sovereign of Egypt was called Pharaoh. There is absolutely no doubt that, in the language of hieroglyphs, “pharaoh” was used to designate the person of the king of Egypt after circa 1370 B.C., i.e., during the reign of Amenophis IV. The biblical author, in the Greek version (Septuagint), and the Hebrew version as well, named the king using a word which appears in texts a long time after the events related here. In several preceding chapters of the book of Genesis, we find the same error.
- 2) The land of Ramesses was situated in the eastern part of the Nile River delta, where today one knows that the

northern capital of the Ramesside period was erected, i.e., during the 13th century B.C. The first king whose name was Ramesses ruled Egypt in the end of the 14th century B.C., while the events related in this chapter date back to the 17th century B.C.

Further, in the present work, we will state that, from a geographical point of view, there is no contradiction between "land of Goshen" and "land of Ramesses." Nevertheless, "land of Ramesses" is an anachronism. For today we know that the Hyksos, when they ruled Egypt, had built their capital at Avaris, in a part of the Nile River delta which is precisely located in our days where the excavations of the German archaeologists in the year 1980 have also located the northern capital of the Ramesside period (13th century B.C.). In his *History of the Ancient Egypt* (*Histoire de l'Égypte Ancienne*, published by Fayard, Paris, 1988), Professor Nicolas Grimal has shown a map of this region, which explains the origin of the chronological confusion of the biblical writer: his memory had kept the name of Ramesses and he applied to the Ramesside period the events which occurred four centuries earlier. It is in the "land of Ramesses" which, later, the enslaved Hebrews were still dwelling.

The biblical narration comes to an end with the settlement of Jacob and his family and the wise administration of the country by Joseph, who provided sufficient supplies. Seventeen years after his entry into Egypt, Jacob died (Genesis 47:28); he was then 147, according to the Bible. But one may wonder if the biblical writer did not over-evaluate the age of Jacob. However that may be, Jacob was mummified according to the prevailing habit in Egypt, and he was buried in Canaan. As for Joseph, maybe his great authority in Egypt led the biblical author to write that he died when he was 110 (Genesis 50:22); he was also embalmed. A certain amount of doubt hangs over these extremely long lives; no deduction could be drawn from them.

Nonetheless, the biblical narration contains details that seem to be significant, as renowned commentators have noticed: these details bring data to light that uphold their chronological hypotheses about the entry into Egypt. Thus, I should like to quote the remarks of André and Renee Neher in their *Biblical History of the Israelite People* (*Histoire Biblique du Peuple d'Israël*, published by Adrien Maisonneuve, Paris, 1962). They are concerned with chapters XLV and XLVI of the book of Genesis: the

chariots were the means of transport used by Joseph when he went to meet Jacob and his family on their way to Egypt (46:29). (Another passage of Genesis mentions the horses (47:17), then used in Egypt). A. and R. Neher have written about the horses:

Tamed horses were unknown in Egypt during the Old and Middle Kingdoms. The Hyksos introduced them into the country; they were used not only as mounts for riders, but for pulling chariots. The pharaoh who sent chariots to meet Jacob is naturally a king who reigned after the Middle Kingdom: there is every chance that he was a Hyksos.

I mention this detail as a noticeable element to be taken into account.

Historical data about the Hyksos in Egypt

As far as we know, it is most likely that the entry of the Hebrews into Egypt could not have occurred before the end of the Middle Kingdom, i.e., before the beginning of the 18th century B.C. Moreover, as it will obviously appear at the end of this chapter, to situate this entry during the New Kingdom would be incompatible with established historical data; nonetheless, several authors held such a hypothesis. Therefore, the one and unique period when a man coming from Palestine might have had real possibilities of becoming a very important person in Egypt is the intermediate period between the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom.

At the end of the Middle Kingdom, when literature had reached a high point (for didactic writings and novels, as well), and architecture and statuary had come to a peak, Egypt was ruled by a succession of kings without authority, whose reigns were of very short durations. Their political power was extremely weak. Those who ruled the country were, most of the time, governors not belonging to the establishment. Then, the frontiers of the country were opened to skillful conquerors who were, at the same time, clever and possessors of great material power: such were the Hyksos coming from Palestine.

At first, they settled in northern Egypt and progressively penetrated through the southern part, where the previous autochthonous monarchs had been repelled. In the North, in the eastern part of the Nile River delta, the Hyksos built their capital, Avaris. This city has left vestiges that are considered by archaeologists as being of the utmost importance for history. So, Father de Vaux, in his book *Ancient History of Israel* (*Histoire Ancienne d'Israël*, published by J. Gabalda, Paris, 1971) has mentioned the high value of the excavations carried on in this region, on the site of Tell Ed Dab'a, not far from Qantir: there, vestiges of Palestinian origin; and remnants of the Hyksos period have been uncovered, like scarabs wearing the name of a Hyksos king, for example. On the site of Tanis, close to the preceding one, in 1863, the French Egyptologist A. Mariette discovered the famous stela which is called *Stela of the Year 400*: it showed that, four centuries before the visit, during the reign of Horemheb, of a "Seth-Priest" (who will become Sethos I, the father of Ramesses II), the Hyksos were settling there: the event, necessarily, occurred during the third quarter of the 14th century B.C., and, consequently one deduces that the Hyksos settled on this site during the third quarter of the 18th century B.C.

The history of the Hyksos has been divided into two periods: the first one, called "Period of the six great Hyksos" whose duration would have been 108 years according to the "Turin Papyrus," and the second one, when the authority of these rulers reached Upper Egypt, during about 40 years. Then, despite this territorial expansion, the Hyksos kings would not have had the same great power; among the last kings we note Khyan and Apophis, whose names are mentioned in monuments in the southern part of the country (like at Djebelain, to the south of Thebes). Precisely in Upper Egypt (at Thebes, for example), several traditional Egyptian monarchs had taken refuge, as vassals of the former. Later, they rebelled against the Hyksos rulers, like the kinglet Sekenenre, who became famous in history, because his mummy—that could be seen, before 1979, in the Mummies Room of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo—showed several broad lacunae of the front, marks of severe blows received in the course of a battle against the Hyksos. Finally, circa 1580 B.C., King Ahmosis expelled the Hyksos from Egypt and founded the 18th dynasty.

This long domination of the Hyksos over Egypt is explained at first by an obvious material superiority: the Hyksos had introduced the

use of war-chariots drawn by horses (the taming of horses was then new in Egypt); their light weapons (in bronze) were much more efficient than those of the Egyptians (in copper). Such a supremacy left impressive memories in the minds of the Egyptians for a long time after the liberation of the country. Moreover, such a recollection was utilized by some demagogue rulers, in order to give a wrong idea of the Hyksos period: they extolled the courage of the liberators or prided themselves on having restored traditional power and religion, as Queen Hatshepsut did, more than one century later....

In fact, the Egyptian religion was never abolished by the Hyksos, but their invasion had become a classical literary theme: at the time, the scribes copied novels describing past events by deliberately blackening them, though the Hyksos did not deserve such a bad reputation. On the contrary, as soon as they invaded Egypt, they adopted the gods of the country, Re and Seth particularly, while joining to them Semitic (among them the Syrian) deities; they realized a fruitful mixing of cultures, adopted the royal protocol, chose Egyptian names, utilized the administrative system of the previous sovereigns, as Father de Vaux emphasized:

...referring to the case of a great treasurer of the Hyksos who had selected for himself an Egyptian name and title, besides another one who had kept his Semitic name. Since the Hyksos had maintained the same procedures for the administration of the country as the preceding rulers, they were able to preserve a certain degree of political unity, without having been prepared for such achievements in their country of origin.

The benefit for Egypt was considerable. The same author rejects the statements of certain demagogue sovereigns who presented the rule of the Hyksos like a disaster for Egypt, as follows:

Agriculture was not neglected, commercial activities continued and even became more developed between the Nile River delta and Palestine. There was no change in the religion: Queen Hatshepsut and Manetho, the historian, were wrong for having said that the Hyksos only accepted the

god Seth, since they introduced Re into their royal protocol. The cultural life was not interrupted: very important literary and scientific texts date back to this period. The Hyksos domination brought two main benefits to Egypt: at first, it obliged the Egyptians to abandon their arrogant pretension of being an untouchable people, living in a divine country, apart from barbarian peoples: in this way, the awakening of a national and fighting spirit was prepared for the future. Moreover, Egypt came out of her isolation and had connections with other kinds of cultures. The Hyksos in Egypt were like a bridge between Africa and Asia. Without supposing the role they would indirectly play in the future, the Hyksos had prepared the way for the political conquests and cultural influence of the New Kingdom.

In his book *History of Ancient Egypt* (op.cit.) Professor Nicolas Grimal emphasizes the especially high capabilities of the Hyksos as builders, disseminators of Egyptian literature and “inventors of new processes of government that, later, will be successful for every conqueror who adopts them, unlike any other.” The Egyptologists who took special interest in the study of the Hyksos, like Professor J. Vercoutter, stress the fact that their process of administration was largely open to foreign civil servants.

A parallel is to be drawn between these opinions of historians about the Hyksos and the teachings of the Bible about the capabilities of Joseph. One may suppose that the capabilities of the latter were developed very effectively, since the governors of the country were excellent administrators and their attention had been attracted by the features of Joseph at this point. In addition, these rulers of Egypt were open-minded to such an extent that they gave high responsibilities to a young man coming from a foreign country. The exceptional destiny of Joseph, as the Bible narrates it, is explained by the fact that the story of the son of Jacob took place in a period of Egyptian history which is quite exceptional, as well.

A trace of the name Jacob expressed in hieroglyphs

Since the end of the 19th century, specialists in Old Egyptian have been aware of the existence of the word “*Israil*” which appeared in a hieroglyphic text. Despite the fact that this quotation is unique, knowledge of it is widespread. On the contrary, the quotation of the name of Jacob in the same language is not so well-known: nevertheless, Jacob was similarly expressed in the titles of a Hyksos king of the 15th dynasty, who reigned during the 17th century B.C.

We must take into account that the Hyksos, who were respectful of the Egyptian religious customs, kept on using the names of local gods for their titles; in this way, the name of a sovereign expressed religious facts, exactly like it did for the traditional sovereigns of the country.

Thus, the king MERUSERRE



MER USER RE

YAKUB HER

had a first titular name which means: “The one who loves the power of (god) Re.” But it is the first element of the entire name, as for Ramesses II, where the first element was: “The (god) Re gave birth to him,” preceding four other expressions, each of them having a religious sense. For King MERUSERRE, one knows only what follows the first element, two words: YAKUB HER, whose orthography is alphabetic and would not leave us in uncertainty about the translation: “Yakub (Jacob) is content (or satisfied).” One cannot know the reason for it, the more so since we are not aware of the last elements of the entire name: we may suppose that they would have been useful to a more complete understanding.

Some specialists in Old Egyptian seem not to have taken an approach that would have taken biblical history into account in their interpretation of the word “Yakub” as Jacob. From a purely linguistic point of view, they discuss the meaning of “Her,” assuming that it might not have the classical meaning that is reported here: maybe it would have

been transliterated from the Semitic word “EL” whose sense is “deity” and would become “Her” in hieroglyphs; through such an alteration “Yakub Her” would have a different meaning.

Nevertheless, we must draw special attention to what we know about this Hyksos king of the 15th dynasty: he reigned circa 1650 B.C., as is accurately stated in a reference to the date of his quarrel with a kinglet of Thebes that is confirmed by texts. Also, it is most likely that we can situate a little before this precise time the entry of Jacob into Egypt, according to the general results of the present study. At the very least, the mention of the word “Yakub” in a titulary of a Hyksos king—unique in hieroglyphs—means that the Hyksos aristocracy had just then introduced the name of Jacob as a kind of patron. Despite the absence of a rigorous demonstration from a linguistic point of view, we may suggest the possibility of an additional correspondence between the biblical teaching and the history of this time.

Other Egyptian features of the biblical narration

The reason Joseph was discharged from an unmerited imprisonment was his ability to interpret dreams, when the king became aware of this talent. The dreams of the king were related to a threatening famine: they concerned seven cows, sleek and fat, and seven others, gaunt and thin. It might have been sometimes very difficult for the high authorities of the country to be able to provide food supplies, so scant were the lands appropriate for agriculture in the Valley of the Nile, and, even more difficult, to supply a neighboring region, like Canaan, the country of Joseph’s family, from which his brothers came in order to find supplies when they were in need.

In Egypt, sometimes the situation was very bad. Of course, every year, around July 19 (according to our calendar), the Nile floods brought waters and promises of a satisfactory harvest to come. Despite the fact that the texts do not mention extremely great irregularities in the Nile floods with severe consequences for agriculture, it was better, for a wise administrator, to plan to take a part of the produce of the land during the years of plenty, as Joseph would order for one fifth of the harvest (Genesis 41:34-36). In fact, no Egyptian document relates such wise

general measures that brought the important final result of sole ownership. But the likelihood of such a precaution is in conformity with what the threat of famines suggested.

The book of Genesis contains two chapters (XL and XLI) dealing with the worried dreams of the king. To give such a significance to the dreams is not strictly proper only to Egypt, since, in these times, for all people of this part of the world (among them, Phoenicians), dreams had played a great role before the taking of decisions. In Egypt, their role was particularly important at this point.

The Bible contains interesting data about the embalming of Jacob (Genesis 50:2-3): "Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel." (Israel is the second name of Jacob in the Bible). "Forty days were required for it, for so many are required for embalming." These lines state that Joseph had submitted himself, like Jacob, to the Egyptian secular customs. The detail concerning the duration of the embalming process draws special attention, for the Egyptian texts do not bring to light much data related to this point. Besides the "40 days" mentioned by the Bible, Diodorus of Sicily (1st century B.C.) related a technical stage of 30 days' duration for mummification that is very close to the biblical account: very likely both data are not far from reality.

The place where the first Hebrews dwelled in Egypt

In our comments on the biblical narration, we have situated the place where Jacob and his family dwelled, when they entered into Egypt, in the eastern part of the Nile River delta, close to Avaris, capital of the Hyksos, official seat of the administration directed by Joseph: we had come to this conclusion despite apparent discordance between the biblical texts that we possess today.

At first sight, chapters XLV to XLVII of the book of Genesis do not bring anything other than confused data. On the one hand, we successively notice the promise of Joseph of giving a residence to Jacob and his brothers in the land of Goshen (45:10), the arrival of the latter in the same land of Goshen (46:28-29), and the welcome of the king to the same place (47:6). On the other hand, the Bible says that "Joseph settled

his father and his brothers... in the land of Ramesses, as Pharaoh had commanded." (Genesis 47:11) The translations of the Hebrew text given in English and in French, as well as those of the Christian commentators, are contradictory as far as the place of residence is concerned.

One may well wonder what is the situation of the land of Goshen in relation to the land of Ramesses. Moreover, when one has a certain knowledge of history, the mention of "Ramesses" in that time appears as being anachronous. The same confusion is noticed in the text of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, published in Great Britain. Most of the time, the comments about these points are missing or quite vague. So, in the translation edited by the Biblical School of Jerusalem, published in 1962, Father de Vaux has written about the land of Ramesses: "The city of Ramesses was identified with Tanis or Qantir.... The link between the land of Ramesses and the land of Goshen is loose...." (p.205) When these lines were written, the author was not yet definitively aware of the precise location of the city of Ramesses. Today, we know that this city was built on the site of Qantir, in the Nile delta, at a distance of a little more than 20 kilometers from Tanis. As to the "link" between the land of Goshen and the land of Ramesses, an answer may be given today.

Goshen is not mentioned in any ancient Egyptian document. The city of Goshen in Judea is not a possibility: Jacob and his family could not have been settled there, far from the Nile delta. But in his book *Ancient History of Israel* (op.cit.), which appeared in 1971, Father de Vaux discusses data which are particularly interesting when we refer to the Greek version of the Bible, the Septuagint. In the verses of this version mentioning the place of Goshen, we read: "Gesem of Arabia" (Genesis 45:10 and 46:34). This does not mean at all that a land of the Arabic Peninsula is concerned. For we know that, in the Greco-Roman Period, (the period when the Septuagint was written, precisely during the 3rd century B.C.), Goshen was a province of the Nile delta with Faqûs as its county seat. In verses 28 and 29 of chapter XLVI of Genesis, the Septuagint calls it "Heronopolis," a site on which, much later, the enslaved Hebrews built the city of Pithom, according to the book of Exodus. Moreover, in these verses, the Septuagint specifies that Jacob and his family made there a stopover "on their way to the land of Ramesses." In Genesis 47:11, the Greek version said that their final destination was the land of Ramesses.

The mention of this stopover and this final destination in the Septuagint (chapters XLVI and XLVII) appears as being of the utmost importance in locating the first Hebrews' point of entry into Egypt: this mention does not exist, as far as I know, specified with enough emphasis, as it should be, in any French or English edition of the Bible. A distinction should have been made between the stop on the way (Goshen) and the final destination (land of Ramesses); otherwise, the confusion that results does not allow us to recognize the interest of reading in the Bible the mention of the two places. It was even worse when one referred to editions that appeared before modern times, like the famous edition translated under the direction of Lemaître de Sacy (17th century), when the exact meaning of Ramesses was unknown. Today, as far as the final destination is concerned, we must refer only to the last teaching of the narration (47:11): "Joseph settled his father and brothers and gave them property in the best part of the country, the land of Ramesses, as Pharaoh had ordered."

Does all this not suggest that the translators introduced confusion due to a lack of reference to the oldest text which is known, i.e., the Septuagint? Father de Vaux has emphasized that the data of the Greek version allow us to specify the location of the land of Goshen in the Wady Tumilat, not far from the Bitter Lakes: thus, we can discern what the route to the land of Ramesses was. Moreover, from recent excavations carried out by German archaeologists in the eastern part of the Nile River delta, one can deduce that the land of Ramesses was in the neighborhood of the ancient Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos rulers. Consequently, today there is no doubt about the place where the first Hebrews dwelled in Egypt.

Today, the region of "Goshen" and the sites of the "land of Ramesses" and "Avaris" have been located with great precision. An excellent survey of the archaeological findings concerning these places has been recently published in the American Egyptological Review *K.M.T.*, edited in San Francisco, CA., U.S.A. (Winter 1991-1992 issue, pages 20-27). Glen V. McIntyre, under the title: "Locating Per-Rameses" has written a remarkable article. The maps joined to the text allow us to easily follow the way that the first Hebrews entering into Egypt took, according to what we read in the Septuagint version of the Bible.

Reflections about several details of the narration

What follows can not modify the conclusions concerning the time and place of the dwelling of the Hebrews. The interest of these reflections lies in the fact that they question literally accepting certain assertions of the biblical text when they seem to be in contradiction with secular knowledge.

At first, from a general point of view, there might be errors coming from a writer or a copyist. In the biblical narration that is concerned here, when Genesis mentions (41:23) the "seven ears... blighted by the east wind," this suggests a reflection: when one knows something of the Egyptian climate, and if one supposes that, 37 centuries before, the regime of winds would have been the same as today, one must remark that the devastating wind comes from the South and not from the East. Is it not well-known in the Nile River delta?

We have noticed that the word "Pharaoh" here designates a sovereign of Egypt. We know that such a designation was right in the time of Moses, but modern linguistic studies have shown the meanings of the word in older times: "Pharaoh" began to point out indicate "the great house" that was the residence of the sovereign during the Old Kingdom, circa 2400 B.C.; later, the word designated the person of the king himself, but not before Amenhotep IV, circa 1370 B.C. (J. Vercoutter). Therefore, in the biblical narration, here the use of "Pharaoh" is an anachronism: under the rule of the Hyksos, there was no "Pharaoh." Very likely, the biblical writer used the word "Pharaoh" because such was the custom in his time.

There is another anachronism for which the biblical writer is not responsible (at least, for the texts composed before the period of the Roman occupation of Egypt); it concerns the mention of camels as beasts of burden in the caravan of the Ish'maelites whom the brothers of Joseph met, according to the biblical version, in describing his sale to caravaneers (Genesis: 37:25-30). It is well known today that the camel was not then tamed. The Bible mentions elsewhere goods carried by asses (for example, when the brothers of Joseph brought grain from Egypt to Canaan in Genesis 44:3).

The camel, and the dromedary as well, were utilized as beasts of burden only when the Romans occupied Egypt (likely not at the

beginning of this period): this is a notion whose confirmation was provided to me by the late André Lhote who studied this matter in North Africa; André Lhote wrote a book about this topic entitled *Camel and Dromedary in North Africa and Sahara* (*Le chameau et le dromadaire en Afrique du Nord et au Sahara*, published by Groupe Media International, Paris).

In any document concerning ancient Egypt, there is not the least sign of such a use of this means of transport, which is the most convenient for arid regions. One cannot find an Egyptian bas-relief dating back to the period before Christ, showing camels utilized as beasts of burden: for example, in the great temple of Abu Simbel in Egypt, the famous bas-relief representing the battle of Qadesh, shows that the means of transport used by the armies of Ramesses II were horses, oxen and asses; one easily imagines that going as far as the river Orontes (North Syria), situated several hundred kilometers from Egypt, during the 13th century B.C., the pharaoh would have appreciated possessing a means of transport much more suited to a far-reaching expedition than what is represented in his Nubian Great Temple.

In the Bible, there are other mentions of camels used as beasts of burden, for example in chapter XXIV of Genesis, we find 16 mentions of such a means of transport used during the time of Abraham. There is no doubt that anachronisms of this kind are the result of additions to the text that date back to the Roman period, when the camels appear to be an excellent means of transport in these countries. So, additions to the original text were made in the Greek version, the Septuagint, composed during the 3rd century B.C., by somebody who later introduced mentions of camels as beasts of burden, in Genesis (12:16 and 30:43), in conformity with their use in his time: he described past events by making them as plausible as he could, very likely with the best intention.

If we did not have a substantial knowledge of the history of the biblical texts and the existence of compositions made up at different periods in the course of time, we might draw erroneous conclusions about the value of the narrations from a historical point of view. When one is objective and without any prejudice in these matters, one must take considerations of this kind into account, in order to avoid wrong judgments concerning the Bible.

The biblical narrations of the first Hebrews in Egypt as a "Mosaic"

As in the case of the Pentateuch itself, scriptural study shows that the composition of these narrations is the result of an amalgam of ancient traditions which were gathered by a unique writer. Consequently, they contain contradictions; among them the specialists mention, for example: in one version, Joseph is sold by his brothers to the Ish'maelities; in another Joseph is found in a pit and taken off by the Mid'ianities in one version, Joseph is the slave of an anonymous person who puts him in a jail; in another version, he is a servant of Potiphar, who was a high-ranking man.

According to Father de Vaux, the biblical text of these chapters was composed by gathering elements from the Yahvist version and from the Elohist version, each of them keeping their proper relations of diverse episodes or events.

So, the Yahvist version relates: the story of the wife of Potiphar (Genesis 39:7-20); the story of the episodes concerning Judah and Benjamin, two brothers of Joseph (Genesis, Chapters XLIII and XLIV; and the description of the measures concerning agriculture taken by Joseph. (Genesis 47:13-26)

The Elohist version relates: the interpretation of dreams (Genesis 40:2 and 41:32); Joseph's behavior, full of generosity, towards his brothers; and the death of Joseph. (Genesis 50:15-26)

As to the other parts of the narration, Father de Vaux says that the specialists do not agree about what belongs to one version or to another: they have less and less precise opinions as the narrations come to the end of the book.

We must remember that an interval of one century exists between the Yahvist version and the Elohist version; moreover, three centuries after the Elohist version, the writer of the Sacerdotal version assembled the previous narrations and composed another definitive text. Thus the multiplicity of composition explains the existence of discordance, errors and anachronisms.

The happy times of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt

In the hypothesis of an entry into Egypt during the 17th century B.C., in all likelihood, the happy times for the Hebrews would not have ended when Joseph died, and, most probably, he would have died before the Hyksos were expelled from Egypt.

The whole country was then again in the power of the traditional rulers, when Ahmosis founded the 18th dynasty, circa 1580 B.C., the date of the beginning of the New Kingdom. This political change leads us to pose the question: What were the consequences for the Hebrews, free in Egypt until that time? What would have been the duration of the happy times for them, during the 18th dynasty, before they became enslaved?

There is no teaching in the Bible about the time which elapsed from the death of Joseph to the oppression. If the whole stay of the Hebrews lasted 430 years, very likely there would have existed a happy period preceding oppression, but we have no valuable information about it.

We might also ask ourselves: why the Hebrews did not follow the Hyksos when they left Egypt, since they had been so warmly welcomed by them in the past? They might have dreaded that the new rulers of Egypt would feel resentful against them, since one of them had served the usurpers. It is possible that their feeling was in fact different, but the Bible does not contain the least teaching about this, as there is no transition between the narration concerning Joseph and the relation of the enslavement, beginning during the reign of a king who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8).

One cannot have a precise idea of the duration of the happy times for the Hebrews. Israelite commentators (like Rabbi Elie Munk, in the *Voice of the Torah*) deduce—from a hypothesis of a stay lasting 430 years—the possibility of a happy period of 220 years' duration. But there are other estimates.

Nevertheless, certain biblical details about the life of the Hebrews, their social behavior and attitude toward local religion are full of interest, for they suggest what might have been the relationship between the Hebrews and the Egyptians. First, during the time of Joseph, the introduction of the name of Jacob in the titulary of a Hyksos king is a sign of perfect harmony. After the departure of the Hyksos, the religious

concepts of the traditional monarchs were naturally different from those of the descendants of Jacob; then, it can be questioned whether or not the Hebrews had been obliged to accept a certain degree of assimilation, which might have been initially welcomed by the new rulers, the traditional monarchs.

A. and R. Neher in their book, *Biblical History of Israelite People* (op.cit. p.98 and 99), make interesting comments:

The social activities of the Hebrews were soon connected with the Egyptian life. Initially, they continued with their ancestral works, as cattle-breeders in the delta. Others chose new occupations, as potters, gardeners, weavers; some of them were employed in the house of the King. Such changes acted upon the religious practices, often leading to the renunciation of certain ancestral practices, and sometimes bringing about the adoption of Egyptian religious beliefs. Several passages from the Bible (Joshua 24:14; Ezekiel 20:1-8 and 23:3-8) put emphasis on the fact that certain Israelite groups were completely assimilated and gave themselves over to a life of debauchery and a distortion of the ritual rules: the Bible rigorously condemns such behavior, like "they do in the land of Canaan" (Leviticus 18:13). The assimilation could not be other than spontaneous, for, even in the worst period of oppression, the Egyptian authorities had never obliged the Hebrews to abandon their religion and to adopt the Egyptian beliefs. All that precedes appears as a normal occurrence from a sociological point of view. Had the Hebrews not followed the behavior of the Hyksos who wanted to conduct themselves like Egyptians as completely as they could in order not to appear as foreign conquerors? In this way, the Hebrews acted in conformity with the general attitude of their time.

Nonetheless, these authors stress that the Hebrews were respectful towards their ancestral traditions: use of their native language, belief in a unique God, persistence of ritual practices like circumcision (not

compulsory in Egypt), concern about their future return to the land of their fathers, i.e., the land of Canaan (II Chronicles 7:20-22). We must note that, despite the opposition between the belief in a unique God of the Hebrews and the polytheism of the Egyptians, the concept of reward or punishment after death, according to merits or sins, was shared by both communities.

One cannot deny the reciprocal influence of cultures, but not so much as to suppose—as some authors asserted—that Egyptian traditional ideas or customs inspired the concepts of monotheistic religions at the beginning by exerting a direct influence upon Moses, since he was educated in Egypt. This aspect of the life of Moses will be dealt with in another chapter; when his life is situated in time, we will be in a position to deduce that, for example, he could not have been influenced by the so-called “monotheistic” revolt of Akhenaten, or that a pharaoh in his time was not able to become a teacher of monotheism for him. The fundamentally polytheistic features of the Egyptian religion have been, unfortunately, overshadowed to the benefit of romantic theses. In fact, there is not, in the long run, a possible compromise between Moses and Pharaoh.

Other hypotheses about the date of entry of the Hebrews into Egypt

In the past—and sometimes in our days—several authors held that this entry might have occurred during the 15th century B.C. One of them was Father H. Vincent, archaeologist of the 20th century, who, unfortunately, only took data of his specialty into account, while giving credit to a tradition regarding the duration of the stay in Egypt that did not attach great importance to history. He supposed that, from the data of his excavations in Palestine, the date of the Exodus could be deduced and, from this first estimate, the subtraction of the duration of the stay might lead to the location in time of the entry. In his book *Canaan* (published in 1930 in Paris), he held that, for him, a stay of 210 years' duration was the one and only conceivable stay through reasoning as follows—210 years was an addition of two periods of time:

- 80 years: age of Moses when he requested the liberation of his people from Pharaoh (Exodus 7:7), an acceptable teaching;
- 130 years: according to a tradition, this would have been the age of the mother of Moses at his birth; moreover, for certain commentators, these 130 years had only a metaphoric meaning, which points out the duration of the stay in Egypt of the Hebrews, up to when Moses was born.

Whatever surprises this reasoning arouses, it has, strangely, led to establishing conclusions which were adopted by several commentators: not so long ago, I heard an eminent commentator of the Bible upholding this curious evaluation of the duration of the stay....

The results of the excavations carried out by Father H. Vincent on the site of Jericho provided him with a basis which he thought solid (we know today that the results are untenable). He supposed that the city had been occupied by the Hebrews circa 1200 B.C. By subtracting the duration of the journey through the wilderness (40 years), the author assumed the occurrence of the Exodus circa 1240 B.C. and consequently, through another subtraction of 210 years (the stay), the entry into Egypt was located around the middle of the 15th century B.C., i.e., during the reigns of Amenhotep II or Tuthmosis IV. Father Vincent thought that the hypothesis of Tuthmosis IV was the most plausible, because the king had married a foreign princess, this leading the author to suppose that he would not have been hostile to foreigners and consequently favorable to the rising of Joseph to the function of a high-ranking official. The flimsiness of the reasoning is obvious.

Moreover, the historical data show that, during the period of Amenhotep II-Tuthmosis IV, the policy of Egypt continued to be ultra-nationalist (this will be seen again regarding other events). Like his predecessor, Tuthmosis IV was a despot; in their book, *Egypt (L'Egypte)*, published by Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1962), Drioton and Vandier labelled him "oriental potentate." Despite his passionate love for a foreign princess, how such a despotic ruler could have raised up a young and humble native of Canaan to the function of almighty administrator of Egypt is difficult to imagine. Every specialist in Egyptology

knows that the condition of Egypt at this time was excellent, the king being renowned for his taste for tributes received from foreign countries, his love of luxury, and his contribution to the expansion of the arts; the country was prosperous. When the hypothesis of Father Vincent is confronted with the realities taught by history, one does not understand why it might seem plausible to several authors in our days.

3. The Oppression: Are the Oppressed Hebrews Mentioned in the Egyptian Texts?

“Then the Lord said, ‘I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings.’” (Exodus 3:7)

So, the Lord spoke to Moses, when he was in the land of Midian, in order to remind him of the affliction of his brethren, but the oppression of the Hebrews had begun before the time of Moses.

Principal biblical narrations of the oppression

Chapters I, II and V of the book of Exodus deal with the oppression.

In chapter I, the motives are related. They are not in connection with religion at all; only demographic problems induced the sovereign to reduce the Hebrews to slavery. Verses 8 through 14 of chapter I are explicit:

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people: “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens, and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Ramesses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they made the people of Israel serve with rigour, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigour. (Revised Standard Version of the Bible)

Thus, the king of Egypt, while making use of the Hebrews as forced laborers, did his best in order to limit their number. Then he gave precise commands to the Hebrew midwives: "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him; but, if it is a daughter, she shall live." (Exodus 1:16) This order did not succeed in stopping the multiplication of the Hebrew people; the Hebrew women's babies were "delivered before the midwife comes to them," as the Bible says, and "the people multiplied and grew very strong.... Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, 'Every son that is born to the Hebrews, you shall cast into the Nile, but you let... every daughter live.'" (Exodus 1:20-22) This was precisely the destiny that would have befallen the young Moses, but, since he was protected when he was left along the bank of the Nile, he was saved.

Then, the biblical narration relates what follows in the forthcoming chapters: the birth, the events of the life of Moses when he was young, and his long stay outside Egypt, before coming back again to the description of hard labor imposed upon the Hebrews. When the Bible reports the first request of Moses to Pharaoh, the text mentions one of the most heavy works: the gathering of straw and the making of bricks for construction ordered by the king, this making of bricks not being, by any means, lessened due to the necessity of collecting straw by themselves. (Exodus 5:6-20) Details given by the Bible about these different kinds of hard labor may be compared to the data from Egyptological sources concerning the same tasks.

Comparisons with secular data of life in ancient Egypt

Pierre Montet, who, in 1940, was the author of very important discoveries on the site of Tanis, a city frequently mentioned in the Bible, was able to compare his deep knowledge of the Holy Scriptures to what he knew of the life in ancient Egypt, as an archaeologist. In his book *Egypt and the Bible* (op.cit.), he gives interesting comments about the work in the fields and the making of bricks.

The passage from the Bible (Exodus 1:14) mentions only "all kinds of work in the field" and is not explicit. But, another passage of the Pentateuch relates these works: after the Exodus and before the dwelling

in the Promised Land, Moses reminds the people of Israel, saying: "For the land which you are entering to take possession of is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it with your feet, like a garden of vegetables." (Deuteronomy 11:10) The precision of the detail concerning the gesture of the peasant might be left unremarked on by many who have no experience of the habits of the peasants in the Valley of the Nile. The gestures which ensured an appropriate irrigation of the soil in the old times when the Nile floods occurred were characteristic; the peasant was very careful in allowing water to flow in the smallest rivulets opened or closed by him by moving the wet soil with his feet. Archaeologists have observed such gestures recorded on the walls of tombs, for example, where the life in ancient Egypt is represented.

As to the role played by the Hebrews in the making of bricks for construction, Pierre Montet has commented on this aspect of the enslavement by reproducing, on page 63 of his book, a painting of a tomb in the Necropolis of Thebes showing the mass-production of bricks; the workers were prisoners of war, making bricks to be used, by order of the king, for the new buildings in the Temple of Karnak. Pierre Montet has written:

One must not forget that the need for bricks was enormous in ancient Egypt. The temples, tombs and the monumental gates were made of stones in order to correspond to their designations as "temples of millions of years" or "places of eternity"; nonetheless, the enclosures of the cities, the stores, schools, warehouses, private houses and even royal palaces were made of bricks. The walls were very thick (very often up to one meter). As for the cities, the surrounding walls were high enough to block out the view of the inside. So, the amount of bricks for such uses was considerable.

Consequently, one cannot be surprised by the importance given by the biblical narration to the task of making bricks, a hard labor imposed upon the Hebrews; the details of the Bible (alluding to the collection of straw) and the wall-paintings of the tombs are in accordance.

So, the pharaohs—like Ramesses II who had been a famous builder of temples and monuments everywhere in Egypt—were in a position to find enslaved Hebrews, numerous enough to satisfy their need for workers. And we are led to pose the following question: can we find traces of people whose name might evoke the community of the Hebrews in Egyptian texts? Could the hieroglyphic name “*Apiru*” be connected with “Hebrews,” since the two words are somewhat consonantal?

Did the Hebrews rank among the “Apiru?”

Rather than stating that the “*Apiru*” of the Egyptian texts designated the Hebrews—as was once held—it is closer to the state of present knowledge to pose the question of the belonging of the Hebrews to this class of hard laborers, so called in the language of hieroglyphics.

As a result of an orthographic modification, could the word “*Apiru*” have come to indicate the enslaved Hebrews through a similarity of consonance? Many linguists specialized in Old Egyptian brought conclusions which are quite different.

It is difficult to uphold a similarity of meaning when one knows that the word “*Apiru*” initially referred to prisoners of war, brought to Egypt from foreign countries, such as under the reign of Tuthmosis III during the 15th century B.C., after the capture of a city, to be workers in stables; the reference is given by J. Briand and M.J. Seux in *Texts of the Ancient Middle East and History of Israel* (*Textes du Proche Orient et Histoire d’Israël*, published by Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1977), on page 63. Later, during the reign of Amenhotep II, there were 3,600 “*Apiru*” brought to Memphis among thousands of prisoners (*Stela of Memphis*, op.cit. p.62). During the reign of Sethos I, the “*Apiru*” are mentioned in connection with a revolt outside Egypt, at Beishan in Palestine, captured in the mountains and thereafter prisoners in Egypt.

The documents that principally allow finding a certain similarity with the Hebrews date back to the reign of Ramesses II; then, there were “*Apiru*” performing hard labor in transporting stones for the construction of the great pylon of Ramesses in the region of Memphis (Leyde Papyrus 348). N. Grimal, in his book *History of Ancient Egypt* (op.cit. p.315), mentions that, during the reign of Ramesses II, they are used for

the making of bricks, several of them working at Miour (Medinet El-Gourob) in the province of Fayum.

Against this hypothesis of a certain similarity between "*Apiru*" and the Hebrews, one may note that there are mentions of the hieroglyphic word in Egyptian texts which date back to a period having followed the Exodus. During the reign of Ramesses III, "*Apiru*" were reported as living on a land devoted to the god Atum at Heliopolis (in a list of donations given by the pharaoh to different classes of people, among them the "*Apiru*"). As far as we know, the last mention of them dates back to the reign of Ramesses IV: a list of quarrymen excavating stones to be carried to Thebes (N. Grimal, *op.cit.* p.315).

So, one can easily understand the reasons why the identification of "*Apiru*" with Hebrews is discussed by commentators of the Bible and historians as well. Nevertheless, the comments of certain historians of the Israelite people are full of interest, like those of Father de Vaux, (*op.cit.* p.206-207):

At first, one must take notice of analogies concerning their respective statuses in Egypt. Both of them are foreigners, incompletely assimilated to the people around them in Egypt.... The second characteristic is the capacity of "*Apiru*" of being quoted in different places at the same time: the biblical narrations relate such teachings concerning the Hebrews. The mentions of "*Apiru*" cease to appear in the hieroglyphic texts approximately when the mentions of the Hebrews end in the biblical texts; the last mentions of the "*Apiru*" in Egypt are found during the 12th century B.C., while the last mention of the "*Ibrim*" ("Hebrews," in English) in the Bible (I Samuel 29:3) dates back to the end of the 11th century B.C. The Hebrews came from Canaan, like the "*Apiru*," at the time of Amenhotep II. Like the Hebrews, the "*Apiru*" were employed for the construction ordered by the pharaohs; Hebrews building the city of Ramesses (Exodus 1:11) compared to the "*Apiru*" transporting stones for the construction of the great Pylon of Ramesses Miamun.

In the same book (p.310), Father de Vaux emphasizes that the name "*Ibri*" given to the Hebrews in the biblical texts is most frequently found during the period of enslavement; so, "*Ibri*" appears to be particularly related to the oppression and both words "*Ibri*" and "*Apiru*" are, for the most part, belonging to the same period of time.

In addition it is worth considering the possibility of changes in the meaning of a word over the course of time. Initially, the word "*Apiru*" seems to have concerned rebel groups or mercenaries who were captured in Canaan and brought to Egypt as hard laborers; thereafter, the same word might have been used to designate people of the same origin, living in Egypt where they have been enslaved. Father de Vaux suggests a comparison with the evolution of the meaning of the word "Swiss" (as an inhabitant of Switzerland) in Europe:

During the Middle Ages and later, the Swiss served in all the armies of the European monarchies; in France, there were Swiss regiments until 1830 and, at the Vatican today there is a Swiss Papal Guard. In French, until the 17th century "a swiss" might have meant a doorkeeper and today the word may designate an employee in a Catholic Church. (op.cit. p.112)

To sum up, the word "*Apiru*" did not specifically designate the Hebrews; nonetheless, very likely, at the time of the oppression, the Hebrews might have been designated by this name in the hieroglyphic texts.

4. Birth of Moses—Construction of the City of Pi-Ramesses

The interest in knowing when Moses lived

The lack of accuracy of the chronological data concerning Moses had left the field open to hypotheses about his spiritual roots. If his life had been firmly positioned in history, certain hypotheses could not have been held about the origins of his religious concepts.

More generally, this lack of accuracy until now about the Hebrews in Egypt and Moses has greatly furthered theories aiming at a material explanation of the parentage of monotheistic religions as being the result of ingenious constructions of the human mind. So, it was held that the concepts of Judaism might have been derived from certain aspects of the Egyptian civilization. A view of this kind overshadows what we owe to Abraham, the Patriarchs, Jacob and his descendants, among them Moses. For those who spread opinions of this kind, Moses was an Egyptian prince, who, during his youth at the court of Pharaoh, would have been instructed in new religious concepts that had aroused beliefs in a unique god: a pharaoh would have been the precursor of monotheism, and the "Egyptian prince" would have adhered to the new faith.

In fact, there is not the least argument which might support a hypothesis such as this that remains totally unproven, appearing as having been held in order to meet the philosophical wishes and expectations of their authors. Thus, in 1939, S. Freud took such a course in writing about Moses in what was initially destined to be a "historical novel," but was finally entitled *Moses and Monotheism* and unfortunately considered as a historical contribution; it was the starting point of developments allegedly supported by Egyptological data. So, the book of Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, *The Extraordinary Venture of the King of Tell El Amarna* (*L'extraordinaire Aventure Amarnienne*, published by Editions des Deux-Mondes, Paris, 1960) held that Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten had instituted a kind of monotheism which had Egyptian conceptual bases that Moses would have followed. In 1976, another publication, composed under the direction of the same author (to be quoted below),

claimed that Moses would have also been in a position to receive the same lessons concerning monotheism from a successor of the latter, Pharaoh Horemheb, who, in fact, is well-known for having been the “demolisher” of the theses of Akhenaten..... Moreover, in the same publication, this flight of fancy goes as far as to suggest that Ramesses II might have professed monotheism, despite the fact, which every Egyptologist knows, that this pharaoh considered that he himself was a god....

Such imaginative constructions are unlikely; they appear to be untenable when one possesses established data concerning the position of Moses in Egyptian history. The knowledge of this position also supplies elements able to demonstrate that one cannot defend the hypothesis of an influence of Moses upon the so-called monotheism allegedly suggested by Akhenaten, an opinion which had seemed valid to certain commentators of the Bible, though rare in fact.

This chapter of the history of the Hebrews in Egypt can shed light on the problem of the birth of Moses, because modern knowledge is able to make a contribution to locating in time the date of this event as being in close relationship with a biblical teaching concerning the construction of the city of Pi-Ramesses (according to the transliteration of the word in the ancient French editions of the Bible), both facts which I have joined in the title of this chapter. Moreover, it is clear that an attentive reading of the Bible—notwithstanding any secular knowledge—might have proposed the hypothesis of such a connection. For, the Bible generally relates the events that are under concern here according to their succession in time. So, the passage reporting the building of this city by the enslaved Hebrews is followed by another relating certain details of the oppression, with the order given by Pharaoh to kill the male sons, a killing which Moses escaped. Thus we are led to locate in the same period the birth of Moses and the construction of the city with which the name of this pharaoh is connected.

Today, such a connection is easily established. (“Pi-Ramesses” is a better transliteration of the word than the “Piramases” of the modern editions.) Nevertheless, in the past this was not so easy; the history of the discovery of the meaning of the word will show why. But first, we must examine the teachings of the modern editions of the Bible that we possess.

The biblical narrations in the modern editions

The book of Exodus, after an introductory passage relating the names of the descendants of Jacob-Israel, describes the enslavement of the Hebrews in the first chapter; Pharaoh thought them dangerous because they multiplied, so the decision was taken to exert a severe oppression. The description of the oppression is the main theme to which the birth of Moses is connected, while other details are given: hard work in the fields, building of the cities of Pi-Ramesses and Pithom, and in addition the city of On (Heliopolis) according to the Greek version (Septuagint)—the first two are mentioned as store-cities or fortified places.

Then, the birth of Moses is the main event following in chapter II, after the mentions—immediately before, at the end of chapter I—of the orders of Pharaoh to reduce the Hebrew people in number (the details have been given in the previous chapter of the present work); the last order is, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews, you shall cast into the Nile.” (Exodus 1:22)

Moses is to escape. For his mother, a daughter of Levi...

...hid him three months.... She took for him a basket made of bulrushes, daubed it with bitumen and pitch, put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink.... His sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done for him.

Then the sister of Moses suggested “a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child” to the daughter of the pharaoh. She accepted, “named him Moses, because she had drawn him out of the water” (from a linguistic point of view, this point must be discussed). Then, the mother of Moses nursed her son and gave him back to Pharaoh's daughter after three months.

These biblical teachings are essential to position the birth of Moses in history in connection with other data that will be emphasized below.

Comments suggested before the deciphering of hieroglyphics

It is very interesting to refer to the ancient editions of the Bible, for these editions could have led, by themselves, to certain deductions. Unfortunately, several explanations of the meanings of certain words were full of errors, particularly as to the proper nouns. Certain mistakes had not the least importance; for example, as to the real meaning of Pithom, one of the cities built by the enslaved Hebrews, it might have remained totally unknown without any consequence, because, before the deciphering of hieroglyphics nobody could discern that this meant the city of god Atum. But the problem is different for the word Ramesses of the ancient Latin or French editions of the Bible.

I remember that I was in a position to scrutinize what explanations of the name of Ramesses I might find in a French edition published in 1621; this one had been edited by order of Pope Clement VIII and composed in close conformity with the Latin Vulgate printed during the reign of Pope Sixtus V, at the end of the 16th century. An annex to this edition contained many explanations of nouns and names, among them the meaning of Ramesses; it was given as ridiculous nonsense: "Thunder of the Vermin" (*Tonnerre de la vermine* in French). It was really not understandable! I was surprised to read such an interpretation in an edition of the Bible, respectfully called in French *La Bible Clémentine*.

I suppose that Tacitus, despite that he has been one of the most celebrated historians of ancient times (1st century A.D.), had remained somewhat forgotten by the authors of such comments. For, in his famous *Annals* in Latin, he had quoted the name of a king of Egypt having a consonance close to Ramesses. Before having deciphered the hieroglyphs, J.F. Champollion had remarked on it; he had established a parallel between "Ramesses" of the Bible and "Rhamsis" of the *Annals* of Tacitus, when relating the visit to Egypt, during the time of Jesus, of Germanicus, adding that in this time, in this country, there were people who had a good memory of this king.

In a book written by Champollion in 1814 (eight years before the deciphering), *Egypt under the Rule of the Pharaohs* (*L'Egypte au temps des Pharaons*), he let us know that he was aware of the identity of Ramesses (from the Bible) and Rhamsis (from Tacitus). I suppose that the difference between the ways of reasoning of Champollion and the

commentators of the above quoted Bible lay in the fact that the former was searching for data in history and the latter thought that the Bible need not be corroborated with secular knowledge: an attitude of mind still persisting in our days.

In addition to what Tacitus had reported, we must note that another ancient historian, Manetho (3rd century B.C.) had included the names of "Rameses" or "Rampses" in his lists of kings of Egypt; these references are given by J.F. Champollion, in his *Handbook of the Hieroglyphic System (Précis du Système Hiéroglyphique*, Paris, 1828, p.277).

All these data show that, for one and a half centuries at least, corroboration of the biblical teachings and historical data might have led commentators of the Bible to the following logical reasoning.

Since the book of Exodus (2:23) mentions the death of a king of Egypt while Moses is exiled in the land of Midian, Moses had necessarily lived in Egypt during—at least—the reigns of two pharaohs. Moreover, since the city of Pi-Ramesses seems to have been built close to the time when Moses was born, the king mentioned in the Bible through the name of his city, could not have been living when the Exodus occurred. Logically, nobody would have been in a position to make any deductions other than those mentioned above about the contemporaneity of Moses and Ramesses II and the impossibility for this pharaoh to have been the pharaoh of the Exodus. These deductions seem to be obvious, but unfortunately many people have been thrown into confusion by the hypotheses of the Exodus during the reign of Ramesses II and the correlative deduction about the time when Moses was born.

The most recent discoveries concerning several stages of the life of Moses brought a clear confirmation of these statements, particularly what was established on solid bases in the field of archaeology from 1980 to 1986 on the site of Pi-Ramesses, after the excavations carried out half a century ago. Such results were not surprising at all for those who were previously able to corroborate their careful and logical reading of the Bible and historical data.

Modern archaeology in search of locating Pi-Ramesses and Pithom

The authors who had as aims in their research arguments with a view to positioning the Hebrews and Moses in history were brought to think that a big step would be made if one could locate in place and time the cities built by the enslaved Hebrews. In our days, one has good reasons to suppose that investigations in the eastern part of the Nile delta would be suitable.

The error to be avoided in this research was confusing the names of cities of the present time, which might have been distorted through transliterations into Arabic or Coptic (the latter being derived in part from Old Egyptian). Precisely this happened to J.F. Champollion. When he was a young man, he had a passion for the Coptic language and he found that the word "Ramsis" had been given to a city in the Nile delta (same transliteration into Arabic). Much before his deciphering of the hieroglyphs, when he wrote his book, *Egypt under the Rule of the Pharaohs*, published in 1814 (op.cit.), he was led to suppose that the old city of Pi-Ramesses of the Bible had been built where a modern city was known as "Ramsis." Unfortunately, the site was located about 120 kilometers to the west of the site later to be recognized as being the site of Pi-Ramesses. Nevertheless, on the map of the Nile delta contained in this book and in the text, J.F. Champollion kept the biblical name "Ramesses," emphasizing his concern for the preservation of this name in his comments.

The city of Pithom, in conformity with the orthograph of the English editions of the Bible, may be exactly located in our days in the eastern part of the Nile delta, at Tel Er Retabeh or Tel El Maskhuta (in the Wadi Tumila, joining the Nile to the Red Sea?). "Pi" is likely written instead of "Per," which means "estate" or "house," "Thom" instead of "Atum," the Egyptian god, so, the name would mean "the estate of Atum." This is in conformity with the interpretations of commentators of the Biblical School of Jerusalem (Father Couroyer, in the fascicle "Exodus" of the Bible published by this school, p.26) and those of the Israelite experts (Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Voice of the Torah, Exodus*, Paris, 1985, p.7). The results of the excavations were not complete when Pierre Montet noted it in his book *Egypt and the Bible* (op.cit. p.57), and added that traces of the Hyksos and the period of Sethos I had been found on

monuments of this site. The remark about Sethos I corroborates the importance of other data concerning the construction at the time of this pharaoh (as in the case of Pi-Ramesses). Nonetheless, one must take into account the possibility of transports to this site of stones taken from monuments belonging to other sites of the Ramesside period or another period; Nicolas Grimal, in his *History of Ancient Egypt* (op.cit. p.434) noted all that about Pithom, and advised not drawing formal deductions concerning this site.

The situation is quite different regarding the site of Pi-Ramesses; despite the fact that the excavations are somewhat recent, the inventories of the vestiges are not finished and the publications are yet to be completed. Nevertheless, today we know details of the utmost importance to our endeavor of positioning the Hebrews and Moses in history.

More than 50 years ago, in his *History of Israel*, published in 1938 (French edition 1958, A. and J. Picard, Paris, p.200), Monsignor G. Ricciotti drew attention to the interest of locating Pi-Ramesses. As far as the history of the Hebrews and Moses is concerned, he wrote: "The key to the problem would be to uncover the city of Ramesses." I suppose that he had also thought about the date of the construction.

In 1939 no one could imagine, for a while, that an answer to the problem had been given when Pierre Montet carried out excavations on the site of Tanis, in the eastern part of the Nile delta. After having uncovered several tombs of the 21st and 22nd dynasties, he had later found vestiges dating back to Ramesses II. Pierre Montet thought that this pharaoh had built there his northern capital, the enslaved Hebrews having being afflicted there with the heavy burdens described in the Bible. Very likely, Montet did not know what Father de Vaux later reported; a text of the Ramesside period had mentioned Tanis and Pi-Ramesses as two different cities (in fact, the Bible also mentions one and the other). The explanation of this confusion is as follows: vestiges of the time of Ramesses II had been transported there from the city of Pi-Ramesses, that was, we know today, located at Qantir, about 20 kilometers from Tanis; numerous monuments had been demolished in order to be used as material for construction, on the site of Tanis, during the 21st dynasty, about two centuries after the beginning of the building of Pi-Ramesses.

During my stay in Egypt in 1974, I noticed that no Egyptologist could give a precise answer to the question: "Is Pi-Ramesses located at Tanis or at Qantir?" Then I visited the two sites. Around the village of Qantir, I saw only green fields, with channels and rivulets for irrigation dug in perfect order, no trace at all of excavations. I was surprised, the more so since, in France, there were Egyptologists who held that Qantir might be the site of the northern capital of the Ramesside period. I might have left Qantir without having made any observation, but, just before going back to the car, I saw, along a channel, nine pieces of stonework whose sizes might be approximately $80 \times 35 \times 35$ centimeters; cartouches had been engraved on them, which I was not able to read as I am today. I took pictures of these pieces and surroundings. I was told that a plowman had unearthed them with his plow and carefully transported them to the limits of his field. When I was back in Cairo, the narration of my visit and the discovery of these vestiges did not arouse any interest; "the cartouches were, of course, of Ramesses II, but in Egypt it is so common to uncover the name of a pharaoh engraved on stones that one cannot carry out excavations everywhere vestiges of the time of Ramesses II are discovered...." After several years, when I was told that no excavations had been carried out there at Qantir, I made up my mind about the lack of interest of what I had observed in 1974.

Without my having the least responsibility for what happened, something quite different later came about.

By curious coincidence, quite unexpectedly, several years later I learned of the existence of a lecture given in 1979 to the British Academy, London, by Professor Manfred Bietak, Director of the Austrian Institute in Cairo. One of the documents which was projected showed the same pieces of masonry, presented as parts of octagonal columns of a palace dating back to the 19th dynasty—they had been photographed exactly in the same position in which they appear in my photographs.

In 1987, I became aware of a survey of the excavations carried on at the site of Qantir published by the review *Orientalia*, edited by the Vatican Biblical Institute, Rome. These excavations had begun in 1980, under the direction of Dr. A. Eggebrecht of the Pelizaeus Museum of Hildesheim (Germany). Since the beginning of the excavations, Professor Jean Leclant, from the Collège de France, Paris, had reported every year a summary of their results. Fascicle 3 of this review, published in

1987, reported that the first construction could be dated back to the reign of Sethos I; the archaeologists had discovered pieces of drums of columns decorated with triumphal scenes of Sethos I, usurped by Ramesses II. Thus the beginning of construction during the reign of Sethos I was proved.

Through another accidental occurrence, a document related to these excavations came to my attention when I was in the U.S.A. in 1988. When I opened the catalog of the Exhibition "Ramesses the Great," organized by the Museum of Science of Boston (Massachusetts), I saw a photograph that the German archaeologists of Hildesheim had given for reproduction; it showed the foundations of a Ramesside palace at the site of Qantir. Through a curious coincidence, this unique picture of the excavations of Pi-Ramesses I then knew had been taken at the same spot where, in 1974, I had photographed the nine pieces of stonework with the engraved cartouches of Ramesses II; both photographs showed the same background, a farm which in both pictures had been photographed from the same angle of incidence and at the same distance.

Today, we are looking forward to knowing the complete information to be published about the vestiges uncovered at this site, for it will have the utmost importance from a historical point of view. The fundamental acquisition is the proof given concerning the period of the beginning of the construction, i.e., circa the first years of the 13th century B.C.

Pi-Ramesses and history

The city of Pi-Ramesses was the northern capital during the whole Ramesside Period. This period is a turning point in the history of Egypt. During approximately two and a half centuries, the rulers of this country belonged to the 18th dynasty; among them several kings called Tuthmosis gave their name to this period. Another dynasty, the 19th, succeeded during the last years of the 14th century. The founder, Ramesses I, was not a noble—many members of his family had served in the army; for Professor N. Grimal, they very likely originated from the region of Qantir. Ramesses I reigned only a little more than one year.

His son, Sethos I, ascended the throne after having been associated with the rule of Egypt, probably since the beginning of the reign of his father. This kind of association led Sethos I, who reigned for 14 years, to share the power, in his turn, with his son, Prince Ramesses. Thus, the first Ramesside kings were anxious to insure themselves against difficulties concerning their succession to the throne, for they knew that the preceding dynasty had collapsed due to reasons of this kind. So, for many decades there were family ties between the pharaoh and the heir to the throne.

Similar continuity prevailed throughout the planning of construction during this period; so, the decision to build a capital having high prestige in the northern part of the country—the Ramesside kings' native land—was taken during the first years of the 19th dynasty, i.e., around the beginning of the 13th century B.C. The construction of Pi-Ramesses began during the reign of Sethos I; thereafter his son and successor, Ramesses II, smartened up the city, and today vestiges showing the marks of both pharaohs attest the continuity.

In addition to the origins of the family, the localization in the north might also be explained by a spiritual significance: the connection with the cult of a regional god, Seth, of whom Sethos I was priest. The ancient capital of the Hyksos, Avaris, had been built not far from there, a part of it being devoted to Seth.

Moreover, Sethos I showed great concern for the protection of the eastern part of the country against possible invasions, threats of Hittites and revolts in Canaan; Pi-Ramesses was one of the fortified towns built close to the eastern borders, and important military quarters were uncovered during the recent excavations by the German archaeologists. At this point, a biblical teaching must be quoted: the Greek version (the Septuagint) mentions the city of Pi-Ramesses, like Pithom, as a fortified town (*polis okura* in Greek). The city had another characteristic, the magnificence of the buildings and decorations. The Egyptian texts describe the splendor of the construction and embellishments; the town was called "City of Turquoise," in relation to the predominant color of the ornamentation. In 1988, the Exhibition "Ramesses the Great," in Boston showed the very fine pieces of glazed ceramic tiles from the Royal Palace. The first excavations, several decades ago, had already uncovered specimens of this splendor; they had been carried on at the same site,

Qantir, by Mahmud Hamza and later by Labib Habachi, whose first publication appeared in Cairo in 1930. In addition to the description of vestiges dating back to Ramesses II, they had found vestiges of the period of Sethos I, like faience ornaments on which the cartouche of this pharaoh is engraved (the piece is kept at the Louvre, Paris), while other pieces are visible at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Cairo Museum (alabaster cartouches of Sethos I on blue tiles). All that suggests that the reign of Sethos I was the period of the first construction.

The city of Pi-Ramesses mentioned in the Bible is now known by vestiges which settle its location in time and, in addition, afford indirect information about the period when Moses lived. Moreover, what the Bible mentions as the "land of Ramesses" regarding the settlement of the first Hebrews in Egypt may be interpreted in the light of these archaeological data. Both findings, one about the entry into Egypt, the other about the construction of Pi-Ramesses, contemporaneous with the birth of Moses, will be set, in the present work, into a collection of five major biblical teachings which induce correspondences allowing the positioning in time of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt.

In the excellent article "Locating Per-Rameses," published recently in the review, *K.M.T.*, above quoted, Glen V. McIntyre reports data showing that the latest archaeological findings entirely corroborate the statements of this chapter (particularly the dating of the beginning of the building) and provides quite interesting additional information.

Comments on several biblical teachings

Undoubtedly, this first part of the biblical teachings leads us to a decisive positioning of Moses' life in history. Nonetheless, certain details of the narration arouse comments. How can we follow the literal meaning of certain aspects of the rescue of Moses, the genealogy ascribed to him or the name given to the young child?

As in the case of the narration of the story of Joseph in Egypt, which induced similar comments, they cannot mar the general likelihood of the relation of the events. Most of these remarks have been emphasized by experts of ancient Egypt who had doubts as to certain descriptions given by the Bible. An example is the circumstances of the

discovery of the basket where Moses was lying, which was placed along the bank of the river when Pharaoh's daughter saw it. So, Pierre Montet, in his book, *Egypt and the Bible* (op.cit. p.78) expressed his doubts on their likelihood; without being surprised, can we admit that the princess "came down to bathe at the river and her maidens walked beside the river?" (Exodus 2:5) Instead of a literal meaning, some commentators thought that spiritual motives might have explained such a behavior; Rabbi Elie Munk suggests interpreting it according to an intent of purification, since she had been granted God's favor leading to her conversion and the rescue of Moses, while her maidens who had been shocked, dissociated themselves from their mistress in remaining along the river.... In any case, it would have been extremely dangerous to bathe in waters where crocodiles always threaten while—the Egyptian wall-paintings show it—in all the sumptuous residences there were ornamental ponds allowing the same.

The Bible says that the princess named the child Moses because she "drew him out of the water." Moses is an Egyptian name transliterated into Hebrew. Is such an explanation in conformity with the linguistic data concerning Old Egyptian? Not at all. For, the hieroglyphic ideogram means the act of "giving birth, generating"; it appears in many names of Egyptian kings like "god so-and-so gave birth to...." When one wanted to place a child under the protection of a god, one might have given the name of the god whose anniversary of birth supposedly took place on that day: thus the common expression, "god" (Re or Tuth, for example) followed by the word "Mes." "Mes" became "Mos" in Greek, like in "Tuthmosis." Pierre Montet noted in his book (op.cit. p.35):

Maybe the princess had forgotten which god was born the day when she met the child? In Egypt, very often, the name of the god was implied and, consequently, there were many names "Mesw" or "Mesy." The German *Dictionary of Personal Names of the New Kingdom* by Ranke mentions these names transliterated as above. In English, the name became "Moses."

The genealogies of Moses, like other genealogies in the Bible, pose questions, for they cannot be in accord with the duration of the stay in Egypt of the Hebrews, i.e., 430 years according to Exodus 12:40. The commentators noticed that, according to Exodus 6:16-20, Moses could not have had more than four ancestors who lived after the entry into Egypt: Amram, Kohath, Levi and Jacob. Such a short genealogy might have been possible—if need be—in case of a stay of 210 years' duration; but, it became absolutely incompatible with a stay of 430 years' duration, as stated by the Bible, implying that at least about three centuries would have elapsed between Jacob and Moses. The Israelite commentators of *Encyclopedia Judaica* noted this in their article, "Exodus" (p.1046). More generally, the genealogies contained in the Bible are commented on by Father de Vaux, in his book *Ancient History of Israel*, as follows:

In the Pentateuch, the genealogies undoubtedly indicate a duration much less than four centuries for the stay of the Hebrews. As in other books of the Bible, they are incomplete, they skip steps between the last generations that we know and the most remote ancestor of the family. (p.301)

How can we explain all these incompatibilities?

In the edition of the Bible published in fascicles by the Biblical School of Jerusalem ("Book of Exodus," 1968), comments are given about the multiplicity of the sources of the Pentateuch. In his Introduction to the book of Exodus, Father B. Couroyer emphasizes that three traditions—Yahvist, Elohist and Sacerdotal—are found in Exodus, as in Genesis. Despite difficulties of identification that are greater for the book of Exodus, it appears that the Yahvist tradition (9th century B.C.) is prevailing, the other two traditions having brought parallels and complements. The most recent tradition (Sacerdotal), in the 6th century B.C., introduced dates and genealogies to the previous texts. Thus, these successive additions were at the origin of the incompatibilities and contradictions.

An example of the latter: while one text mentions four generations between Jacob and Moses, another assesses that there were 70 men (families in addition), when they entered into Egypt, and a third text that there were 600,000 men (families in addition), when they left the

country. How could we explain such untenable figures related to two of the three statements? Who was responsible for this: a biblical writer or a copyist who wanted to magnify the events?

In spite of what cannot, in all likelihood, be upheld, there are major conclusions to be drawn in order to position in time the period of Moses, thanks to data from secular knowledge.

5. Youth and Exile of Moses: Contemporaneity of Moses and Ramesses II

This period of the life of Moses is positioned in history during the longest reign of the New Kingdom; it is also the longest period of the life of Moses beginning during the first years of the 13th century B.C. During this century, very important occurrences in the life of Moses are to be positioned in correspondence with what we know of the political events of the same time. Easier understanding of such a contemporaneity leads us to relate first historical data and, afterwards, to deal with the biblical narrations, as to what happened in and outside Egypt.

A historical survey

During the first years of the 13th century B.C., Sethos I, sharing power with Prince Ramesses (who will become Ramesses II), embarked on several campaigns in Asia against the Hittites and people of Palestine. These difficulties on the eastern borders had led him to build a fortress on the site of Pi-Ramesses, in order to insure protection of the delta.

Three successive reigns are considered as having been the most important of this century, those of Sethos I (about 14 years' duration), Ramesses II (a little more than 67 years' duration) and Merenptah, son of the preceding king (at least 10 years' duration, maybe 20 years). The length of the reign of Ramesses II induced us to present the 13th century B.C. as the century of Ramesses the Great; it is also the century of Moses who was somewhat younger than his famous contemporary.

Ramesses II ascended the throne when he was young, full of energy and ambition. The Hittite sovereign Mutawallis, who had made peace with Sethos I, then tried to expand his territories in Asia, for he supposed that the new pharaoh might not be experienced enough. Peace-time lasted only a few years. The war against the Hittites and allied peoples started again during the 4th year of the reign of Ramesses, and campaigns were carried on until the 21st year. In the meantime, Ramesses II was also at war against the Libyans. No doubt the first part of the reign was a period of war. Thereafter, peace was maintained for 46 years,

and there was a long period of political stability without any internal crisis, a time of prosperity with riches and donations flooding in from foreign countries submitted to the power of the pharaoh-god. For, the sovereign was then represented through his statues and monuments as being equal to the gods from which he was descended. Everywhere Ramesses II built palaces and temples to his glory: temples in Abu Simbel in Nubia, Ramesseum at Thebes, parts of temples of Karnak and Abydos, embellishments of his capital, Pi-Ramesses in the Nile River delta.

When these undisputable historical data are known, what can one think about the hypothesis of the occurrence of the Exodus *in the course of the reign of Ramesses II*, which would have been preceded by the general disasters described in the Bible under the name of “plagues?” To locate these plagues of Egypt and the Exodus during the reign of this pharaoh is purely and simply ridiculous.

Ramesses II died when he was very old, very likely 85 or 90; the medical examination of the mummy in 1974-1975 at Cairo gave the same approximate estimate of his age at death. The 13th son of Ramesses II, Merenptah, succeeded to the throne, at a date which is approximate, owing to the uncertainties of the Egyptian calendar, maybe between 1235 and 1224 (for N. Grimal, 1213 B.C.). In any case, it would not be erroneous to locate the reign of Merenptah during the last quarter of the 13th century B.C., with the corollary of this estimate concerning the position of Moses in history.

The biblical narration corroborated with the historical data

The preceding chapter has related the story of Moses until the moment when his mother was appointed to the breast feeding. As to what happened in the life of the child, the biblical teaching is summarized in this passage of the book of Exodus (2:10): “And the child grew, and she [his mother] brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son.”

This implies that the young Moses was educated in Egypt, where civics and religious instruction could not have been different from the local norms. Nonetheless, one cannot infer the degree of their influence upon his mind and spirituality. There is another short passage of the

Holy Scriptures alluding to the Egyptian education received by Moses; it belongs to the "Acts of the Apostles," a book of the New Testament, supposedly written by the apostle Luke. This reference has not the least interest for the story of Moses, but unfortunately it has been presented as suggesting a special Egyptian influence upon the spirituality of Moses; for this reason, I must relate it. One may read in the "Acts of the Apostles" (7:22): "And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." The significance of this detail in itself is obviously poor, but it has been presented quite differently.

This statement is a part of a speech, when a certain "Stephen" is answering the questions of the high priest (after the time of Jesus); the questions were related to the history of ancient Israel and this "Stephen" only related several well-known facts and added details proper to him, though the text does not explain what might be the authority of the man in this matter. The context of the "Acts" says only that "Stephen," after having exasperated those in attendance, was brought outside the city and stoned. It is stupefying that an extract from a narration of such a story, totally lacking in earnestness, might have been included in a study that was widely spread about the Exodus in 1976 and where apparently serious Egyptological arguments had been put forward! The author's aim was to support the shaky hypothesis of the influence of Egyptian culture upon the monotheism of Moses, allegedly inspired by his education in Egypt.... We will see later who were the suggested educators....

The taking of stands of this kind about the Egyptian influences upon Moses and their spiritual consequences dates back to a long time ago. Historians like Flavius Josephus (1st century A.D.) or Philo Judaeus (1st century A.D.) related comments which today seem to contain many inaccuracies, the first in his *Antiquities*, the second in his life of Moses, to the effect that the pharaoh would have had a unique daughter who, married, had no child, a situation which made her suffer, for she would have liked to ensure the succession of his father; therefore, she adopted Moses and said that he was her own son. When one is aware of the numerous offspring of kings like Ramesses II, one may consider those historians as having been the precursors of the modern "fiction in Egyptology," since, in our days, several specialists have reported so many queer details about Ramesses II and other pharaohs with a reference to Monotheism. In fact, the Bible does not teach us at all data concerning

the education of Moses in Egypt. As to his youth, it is only said that, when Moses became an adolescent, he was aware of the situation of his brethren, as follows (Exodus 2:11): "One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens." The narration of the relations between Moses and his people at that time is limited to the altercation between Moses and an Egyptian who was hitting one of his Hebrew brethren. Then Moses wanted to give him help, but, unfortunately, he killed the Egyptian. The pharaoh found out what had happened and "sought to kill Moses." (Exodus 2:15) In order to save his life, Moses was forced to flee Egypt.

During his exile, Moses went beyond the Sinai to reach the Arabic Peninsula and the land of Midian, in the western part of the former, where he became a nomad.

The first episode narrated by the Bible is when Moses "sat down by a well" (Exodus 2:15), for this stop had very important consequences. Several episodes of this kind are narrated by the Bible, when, around a well in the desert, nomads, caravaneers and herds with their flocks driven to water meet. The Bible relates that these meetings might have created opportunities for romances ending with marriages (such were the cases of Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and the daughter of Laban, Rachel, who was so very pretty that Jacob served Laban for seven years to marry her). The same circumstances, having the same effects, were at the origin of the marriage of Moses with Zippo'rah, an event full of consequences for the life of Moses.

Moses had drawn the attention of the daughters of Reu'el, father of Zippo'rah, when he went to the well, "drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. Then shepherds came and drove them away. Moses stood up and helped them and watered their flock." (Exodus 2:16-17) Reu'el, in order to thank Moses, invited him to eat bread (Exodus 2:20) and gave him Zippo'rah to marry.

During his exile, Moses received the revelation of his vocation. Chapter III and a part of chapter IV of the book of Exodus are devoted to the event which occurred when Moses saw the bush burning, apparently in the distance.

The biblical narration of the episode of the burning bush is the result of an amalgam of two traditions, following the Christian commentators who have emphasized this in order to explain variations in

the text. The two traditions, Yahvist and Elohist, are present in the text. Each one gave to God a particular name, easily discernable in French ("Yahve" and "The Eternal"), while in the Revised Standard Version this is not so obvious, since, in English, "God" is mentioned alternately with "The Lord." In chapter II, Moses' father in law is named "Reu'el"; he becomes "Jethro" in chapters III and IV.

The revelation was given to Moses in this part of the Sinai that the Elohist version called "Horeb," i.e., "the mountain of God." There Moses saw that the bush burned but it was not consumed. (Exodus 3:2-4) Moses received a call from God to deliver his brethren from oppression and an order to go back to Pharaoh with this purpose. His brother Aaron would assist him in the mission for which both of them would be granted supernatural powers.

The narration ends as follows:

Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me go back, I pray, to my kinsmen in Egypt and see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go to Egypt; for all the men who were seeking your life are dead." (Exodus 4:18-19)

This passage of the Bible has a great chronological significance. God orders Moses to go back to Egypt, since "all the men" who were seeking to kill him—all of them, Pharaoh included (as mentioned in chapter II, verse 15)—are dead. This pharaoh cannot be other than the king previously named, identified through the name of his city (Pi-Ramesses), i.e., Ramesses II. There is another passage of the Bible concerning this death; we read in Exodus 2:23 this passage related to the exile of Moses in Midian, "In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died."

These teachings of the Bible are in complete accord with the historical data and the results of the excavations carried out by the German archaeologists which have been quoted above. Moreover the medical investigations of the mummy of Ramesses II have brought to light certain findings which provide additional correspondences. But we must also emphasize that, before the publication of these recent discoveries,

commentators on the Bible, like Rabbi Elie Munk, noticed a conclusion that might be drawn from the text alone concerning the existence of two pharaohs contemporaneous with Moses. Thus, since the Bible mentions that Moses was 80 when, back in Egypt a short time after his exile, he went to Pharaoh, requiring freedom for his brethren (Exodus 7:7), this biblical teaching is to be put in parallel with what we today know about the age of Ramesses II when he died (i.e., 85 or 90). In his book, *Egypt and the Bible* (1959, op.cit. p.26), Pierre Montet has written that, during the New Kingdom, there was no ruler of Egypt other than Ramesses II to whom we may refer when considering the respective ages of the king concerned and of Moses. The Bible then lets us suppose that this king was Ramesses II; later, the medical research brought supplemental information.

Seeking new data: the medical investigations of Ramesses II's mummy

Any reader of the Bible, keeping one's mind closely focused on the book of Exodus and noticing the building by the enslaved Hebrews of the city designated by the name of Ramesses (Exodus 1:12) and the death of the king of Egypt in the following chapter (2:23), could logically suppose some role played by the sovereign in the events related in these passages. But what kind of role? That was the question.

The first hypothesis which the logic suggests is that the so-called king died before the Exodus, during the exile of Moses; during the 20th century, few authors proposed such a possibility. Most of them defended the hypotheses according to which he might have been a witness of the Exodus or have participated in it without having lost his life in the pursuit. As for locating the events in time, the opinions differed greatly.

What might a medical doctor then have imagined, as a program of research in this field, other than an examination of the mummified remains, first of the pharaoh who is concerned here, but also, at the same time, of his predecessor and successor, since their three successive reigns had extended over the events during almost a century? This was my purpose when I suggested the medical investigations of these mummies.

In the Introduction of the present work, I have set out the start of the research, thanks to the kind permission given by President Sadat of

Egypt to carry out these examinations at the Cairo Museum. The results were reported to several French learned societies and later, with much more detail, in books published in France (1987) and in the U.S.A. (1990). The investigations which were carried out with numerous Egyptian and French collaborators began in 1974.

At the Cairo Museum, a group of almost 30 mummies, most of them belonging to sovereigns of the New Kingdom (circa 1580 B.C. to circa 1080 B.C.), more exactly from the 17th to the 20th dynasties, were displayed in the Royal Mummies Room, where tourists were admitted until 1979. The mummies came from Upper Egypt, where they had been interred in the Necropolis of Thebes, facing Luxor; there, sumptuous tombs had been carved out of the rock in several valleys: Valley of the Kings, Valley of the Queens, Valley of the Nobles.

Owing to the high degree of perfection in the mummification procedures of this time, and the excellent climatic conditions in the tombs, the mummies were in the best conditions to survive without any alteration. Unfortunately, the tombs were long before visited by pillagers who caused damage to the mummies. In order to protect them, around a millennium before Christ, priests of the 21st dynasty took the royal mummies out of their initial tombs. Some of them were transferred to a hiding place near the Valley of the Kings, the famous cache of Deir El Bahari, where, in 1881, they were discovered in the depth of the cliff. The mummy of Ramesses II was lying there in his coffin besides 15 other mummies.

The French archaeologist Gaston Maspero, then Director of the Service of the Antiquities of Egypt, played a crucial role in this discovery. He was carrying out an inquiry, for in the neighborhood there was a trafficking of objects that might have resulted from clandestine excavations in areas known to contain ancient tombs. The inquiry indicated this cache, in which coffins and funerary objects were found. All the mummies were transported to Lower Egypt. Thereafter Ramesses II's mummy was kept in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, and it was not moved from this place except for a stay in Paris, in 1976-1977; I had led President Sadat of Egypt to take the decision to send the mummy to France for a treatment for fungal invasion, one of the findings of the medical investigations carried out in Egypt in 1974-1975. This mummy had been previously examined during its unwrapping in 1886, when Gaston Maspero and Doctor Fouquet carried out detailed observations of the

body and diverse anthropometric measurements. The unwrapping had been quite ceremoniously carried out before the Khedive of Egypt and officials of high rank.

About 29 centuries earlier, during the 21st dynasty, the mummy had been moved from his tomb to the hiding place, and new wrappings put around the body, for pillagers had torn a great part of the coverings set by the embalmers. Nonetheless, the pillagers had not very much damaged the body, since we could find elements shedding light on what might have been the last days of the pharaoh, despite the fact that the organs extracted by the embalmers and put in canopic jars beside the mummy in the tomb had disappeared.

Several years before our investigations, an American team directed by J. Harris and K. Weeks had X-rayed the mummy of Ramesses II and many other royal mummies. This study implemented means of investigation that were more reduced than ours, the latter having been reported in books and read before learned societies; to the X-ray study, we had added research in fields as varied as endoscopy, microscopic examination, forensic medicine..., etc. for Ramesses II and other pharaonic mummies. In the field of radiology itself, the use of special films having a very high sensitivity—which seem to have been lacking to the American group—led us to the finding of a very severe lesion in the mandible of the pharaoh that had not been discovered before: an extensive osteitis of the mandible of dental origin. This discovery provided very important information about what the last days of the life of Ramesses II were like.

The dental condition was very poor; almost all the teeth were decayed, roots included; and in the mandible, there was, on the right side, an area of osteitis, i.e., a lacuna caused by the spread of the dental infection, where we could detect the presence of a small detached bone fragment in the abscess. Such findings enabled us to state that the pharaoh, during the last years of his life, had suffered from an extremely painful infection whose consequences were a high fever and a total disablement; he could have died of this infection. In any case, one cannot imagine that Ramesses II might have been the pharaoh who had been at the head of the pursuit of the Hebrews fleeing Egypt, losing his life during the Exodus.

As to the stay in Paris of the mummy which I have mentioned above, I should like to emphasize that the decision of such an unusual

move of a pharaoh had absolutely no connection with the research concerning the topic of the present work. All the investigations were achieved in Egypt before the journey by air from the bank of the Nile to the Seine in 1976. Unfortunately, many aspects of the starting-point of the enterprise, the overshadowing of the results of the investigations in Egypt (as well as the bad long-term results of "Operation Ramesses" in Paris) have been deliberately reported inaccurately in the book *The Mummy of Ramesses II (La Momie de Ramsès II)* by L. Balout, C. Roubet and C. Desroches-Noblecourt, published by Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, Paris, 1985.

An alleged spiritual influence of Ramesses II upon Moses

In Paris, people had never talked about Ramesses II as much as after the arrival of the mummy in September 1976, the more so since an exhibition gathering antiques of the century of this pharaoh had taken place for several months, organized by the Department of Egyptian Antiquities of the Louvre Museum, directed by C. Desroches-Noblecourt. This exhibition received hundreds of thousands of visitors.

In the entrance hall, they were brought face to face with a map of Egypt showing the possible routes taken by the Hebrews when they left the country at the time of the Exodus, naturally suggesting the occurrence of the event in the course of the reign of Ramesses II.

I was surprised to face such a map, positioned as a proof of a biblical teaching, for C. Desroches-Noblecourt had invited me to deliver a lecture in her department at the Louvre to report the results of the medical investigations of the mummy before I let them be known to the members of the French National Academy of Medicine. The conclusion was that Ramesses II could not have been involved in the Exodus, and I had exposed the flaws of the arguments in favor of such a proposition. At this time we were not aware of all the results that we know today, but the findings already collected showed that Ramesses II had not played the least role in the event.

It seemed to me that the organizers wanted, in any way possible, to give a role in the Exodus to the pharaoh. And I found confirmation of this feeling when I read in the Catalog of the Exhibition a long article

concerning the Exodus and considerations about Moses. This publication, edited by Les Presses Artistiques (Paris, 1976), was presented as having been “composed and written under the responsibility of C. Desroches-Noblecourt”; the article being signed “A.M.L.” It contained very strange statements about the education of Moses in Egypt and the Egyptian influences upon him. A passage of this article is significant:

One cannot limit the role of Moses to the fact that he gave laws to his people. Moses had set norms that are valid for the whole of mankind (H. Cazelles). From this point of view, he has surely been influenced by the Egyptian moral standards. Certain verses of the Decalogue (for example, Exodus 22:21-24) bear witness of it. Egyptian ethics, in the respect of which Moses was instructed, obviously appear in Moses; his concept of religion itself had its roots in Egypt.

The author of the article having claimed that the above quoted verses of the Decalogue testify to the reality of the Egyptian influences upon Moses, I referred to the book of Exodus. I invite the English reader to master in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible this passage of the Decalogue, for he will find what follows (Exodus 22:22-25, corresponding to 21-24 of the French text quoted above):

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him.

In these precepts, what is specifically Egyptian? Nothing, of course. How dare one assert that the ancient Egyptians would have been the first ones to suggest the protection of the widow and the orphan, to condemn lending at usurious rates and that, since Moses gave such

commands, he could not have been inspired in ways other than the Egyptians of his time?

Moreover, the conclusion of the author is also significant:

The monotheism of Akhenaten, despite the “apparent” fighting of Horemheb against it, had made its way into Egyptian thought, and Ramesses II took it up again, in an indirect manner. The advanced civilizations, like the Egyptian, had overstepped polytheism; during his childhood, Moses had been impregnated with the new religious concepts.

In another chapter, I shall deal with the so-called monotheism of Akhenaten which, in fact, was fiercely contended by Horemheb, and I shall show that it was a monotheism limited to the Court, since Egypt had then remained polytheist. One is stupefied to read that Ramesses II would have taken up again the so-called monotheism of Akhenaten (even “in an indirect manner,” as the author has written), impregnating Moses with new religious concepts. Such strange assertions must be confronted with what is firmly established about Ramesses II, the pharaoh-god, everywhere represented as equal to gods from which he was descended. Every tourist in Egypt is in a position to observe that, when visiting monuments like the temples in Abu Simbel, where the pharaoh is sitting down beside Re, Horus and Amun at the extremity of the sanctuary of the Great Temple.

The most astounding aspect of this article—whose contents emanated from the Head-Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities of the Louvre Museum—lies in the following: the authors have provided the readers with the most obvious denial of their assertions! For on pages XXXII and XXXIII, the catalog contains pictures of Ramesses II sitting down beside the three gods which are quoted above, and under the illustration of page XXXIII one can read “Ramesses and the gods are as one” (in French: “*Ramsès ne fait qu’un avec eux*”). Moreover, page XXXI contains another illustration of a bas-relief of the Nubian temple of Wadi Es Sebuia with this comment: “Ramesses is venerating his personal image by appearing among the gods” (the same gods as in Abu Simbel)!

Thus, the authors have brought proof that their assertions about the impregnation of Moses—through Ramesses II—by new religious concepts was purely and simply a whimsical imaginative construction.

A contribution brought by the Jewish tradition besides the biblical texts

The corroboration of the biblical texts with recent data of secular knowledge has led to positioning Moses in time, in relation to historical events of his century that are dated with accuracy. But there are additional teachings of the Jewish tradition, quite apart from what the Bible relates, despite that they have the same origin. Nonetheless, the biblical authors did not use the information that they might have received about the history of the Hebrew people. Access to this source of knowledge is not easy for those who are not familiar with the Hebraic culture. For this reason, one must draw attention to the reports made on the latter by authors who are in a position to collect and translate this precious documentation.

So, Professor R. Draï, in his book *La Sortie d'Égypte (The Exodus from Egypt)*, published by Editions Fayard, Paris, 1992, has given an account of many ancient Jewish comments of the event and what preceded it. These comments are full of interest. Unfortunately, the author seems to have ignored recent works reporting data of secular knowledge, awareness of which would have led him to make quite valuable comparisons and draw conclusions concerning the historical value of the Bible which would have been different, as to the position of Moses in time according to the Bible. Consequently, one cannot admit as expressing reality the following assertion of R. Draï: the Bible “shows an obvious terseness” about the date of the Exodus (op.cit. p.17). On the contrary, is it not evident for any reader of the first two chapters of the book of Exodus that the exit from Egypt of the Hebrews occurred during the reign of the sovereign who ruled the country after the preceding king, who had erected the city of Pi-Ramesses? And the Jewish tradition suggests it clearly!

The book of R. Draï relates many documents of this tradition. As soon as I found out what is reported concerning the time of Moses,

I was led to add several pages to my already registered manuscript. The author gives an account of "Midrashim" whose comments on the first five books of the Old Testament, including the book of Genesis and the book of Exodus, are enlightening on many details of the latter. We know that the Jewish tradition, initially orally conveyed, gave rise to the composition of written accounts, in the course of the centuries, which thereafter were revised. R. Draï makes a special reference, to the text called "Meam Loez," composed during the 18th century A.D., (op.cit. p.338, reference 43). No doubt the author has reported quite a valuable version.

The Jewish authors, in their relations of what was kept in the communities around them as oral tradition, could not avoid, among data having great value, mistakes slipping into the texts. One must first take into account the main lines of these ancient narrations, for they appear in our days in close conformity with certain aspects of modern Egyptological knowledge and the results of special research associated with Egyptology. So, despite that the quoted Midrash contains inaccuracies concerning the technique used in the building of Pi-Ramesses (op.cit. p.79-81) or relates a not easily acceptable interpretation of hieroglyphic expressions, the main contribution from a historical point of view concerns the positioning in time of the Exodus and the end of the life of the pharaoh oppressor of the Hebrews. He is clearly named by the Midrash as being the king "RAAMSES," whom the enslaved brethren of Moses called "RATSAS" (op.cit. p.80). The details to follow designate Ramesses II. For, I have corroborated the text of the Midrash with what we today know about the condition of this sovereign, thanks to the results of the recent medical investigations of the mummy, dealt with above in the present chapter. The Jewish tradition tells of the last days of the life of Ramesses II, during the period when Moses was an exile in the country of Midian, as follows (op.cit. p.124-125):

The pharaoh who had ordered the oppression will never stop living. Not dying. He was more than ninety years old, suffering so much from leprosy that he was rotting while standing up, refusing to leave his throne, to abdicate in favor of his son or his daughter. A never ending agony of the king-god.... Nonetheless, the rotting king kept on living. One more year. Yet another year. And still another

year.... Innumerable years.... In the end he died in such a state of decay that his stinking corpse could not be mummified as usual (Reference of R. Draï: op.cit. p.349, No.53).

What are the teachings of modern secular data? The Egyptologists know that no sovereign of Egypt other than Ramesses II could be referred to here; we know that when the king died he was an elderly man; the duration of his reign (67 years and several months) was surely the longest reign during the New Kingdom. On the other hand, the medical investigations of the mummy, carried on almost 20 years ago, showed to the French-Egyptian study group that the end of the life of the pharaoh was marked by a severe infectious disease with decay of bony tissues (but, not at all by leprosy). Moreover, the corpse of the king was mummified as usual.

From the relation by the Jewish tradition, one of the most significant points is that Ramesses II died during the exile of Moses. This is, indeed, stated in the book of Exodus of the Bible (2:23), but, very often, this verse does not draw the attention of the readers. It is obviously corroborated by the Midrash and implies that the pharaoh of the Exodus cannot be a ruler of Egypt other than the successor of Ramesses II. In addition, one must emphasize the historical value of the information given by the Midrash concerning the condition of the king at the end of his life, whose main points are in close conformity with the quite recent medical discoveries made on the mummy.

Before knowing the latter, since long ago, the Jewish tradition might have led to significant conclusions about the dating of the last events of the stay in Egypt of the Hebrews and the identification of the pharaoh of the Exodus. The Jewish tradition reported by R. Draï gives additional evidence of what might have been deduced previously, particularly since the establishment of the Egyptian chronology during the 19th century.

6. Return From Exile: the Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign

The narration of the return of Moses

After having left his father-in-law in Midian, Moses took his wife and his sons with him and went back to Egypt. Moses had taken in his hand the staff of God, in order to show to Pharaoh the miracles which God had put within his power. On his way to Egypt, at the mountain of God (Sinai), Moses met Aaron, who had come to him by order of the Lord. Moses let Aaron know what their mission would be.

In Egypt, they gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel, did the signs in the sight of the people; then they believed and worshipped (Exodus, last verses of chapter IV).

Afterwards, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh to tell him their request to let the people go and sacrifice to God in the wilderness. (Exodus 5:1) Pharaoh refused to let the people go away from their work, for they were not allowed to rest from their burdens, such as the collection of straw and production of bricks (this part of chapter V has been detailed, and commented about the oppression). After this refusal, the Lord gave to Moses and Aaron a charge for the people of Israel and to the king of Egypt to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. (Exodus 6:13)

The narration is then interrupted by genealogies of sons of Jacob-Israel. Afterwards, the book relates that God informed Moses and Aaron of what would happen after the refusal of Pharaoh, despite the signs and wonders in the land, to listen to them. And God said, "Then I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring forth... the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt." (Exodus 7:4)

When Moses and Aaron began to summon Pharaoh, the Bible says, "Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old." From a historical point of view, it is of the utmost importance to compare the biblical teaching with certain data of secular knowledge.

Age of Moses when he first spoke to Pharaoh

With just reason, one might suppose that, in order to be in a position to accomplish a very difficult mission, two men appointed by God for this purpose must have possessed enough experience, an experience which came to them with years. If Moses and Aaron are said by the Bible to have been 80 and 83 at the beginning of their mission, that might simply indicate the importance given to their experience; so the estimates about the ages in the biblical text could be understood as having a symbolic significance and must not be literally interpreted. Commentators have supported such considerations.

In the case of Aaron there is nothing which would suggest an indication of secular knowledge concerning his age. As for Moses, on the contrary, we possess positive data of this kind; in the preceding chapter, we have taken notice of archaeological findings which, after their juxtaposition with the biblical text, might indirectly bring some information about the period of his birth, i.e., around the first years of the 13th century B.C., when Sethos I was sharing the power with his son, Prince Ramesses (who will become Ramesses II).

When Moses came back to Egypt from his exile, the king of Egypt is the successor of Ramesses II (who died during the exile of Moses in Midian). Egyptian history has established that the interval of time between the reign of Sethos I and the reign of Merenptah (the successor of Ramesses II) was about 80 years; that is precisely the age of Moses given by the Bible at the time of the first request put before Pharaoh. Consequently, from his birth to that time, Moses might have lived during the reign of three pharaohs: very likely for a short time during the reign of Sethos I, surely for a long time when Ramesses II ruled Egypt, and, over the duration of his reign, during the sovereignty of Merenptah.

These deductions are made after having taken into account the recent data concerning the time of the construction of Pi-Ramesses indirectly leading to these estimates. They are in accord with what Pierre Montet had concluded in his book *Egypt and the Bible*, in 1959, about the contemporaneity of Moses and Ramesses II.

The death of the famous pharaoh was a turning point in the history of Egypt, and was also a turning point in the history of Moses and

the Hebrews, a history which would take place from then on during the reign of Merenptah; certain details concerning it are to be recalled.

Some aspects of Merenptah's reign

There is a large difference between what Merenptah inherited from Ramesses II, despite some difficulties inside and outside the country, and what he would leave to his successor.

He had the same wish to build as his father, at least during the first part of his reign, despite his possibilities being more reduced than during the reign of Ramesses II, when the country was more prosperous. Pi-Ramesses remained as his capital, while he ordered building a new palace at Memphis, achieved constructions commanded by his father and erected a funerary temple at Thebes; nonetheless, for the construction in the Necropolis, materials were taken from the temple of Amenhotep III (N. Grimal).

On its borders, the country was then threatened by several neighbors on the west as well as on the northeast. The sovereign had to take up arms against Libyans who had begun to invade the delta; Merenptah defeated them in battles that were surely very bloody, knowing how numerous were the enemies killed, the spoils of war and the number of prisoners. Stelae were erected to the glory of the pharaoh after his victories in Palestine and Syria also, one of them being the famous *Stela of the Fifth Year of the Reign* which alludes to campaigns in these countries; we shall give in-depth comments about it.

Regarding the last years of the reign of this pharaoh, on the contrary, no available document exists. The duration of the reign is unknown: surely at least 10 years, maybe 20. The question is debated by Egyptologists; the reign might have lasted until the final decade of the 13th century B.C.

During a period of about 20 years of the history of Egypt beginning with the last years of Merenptah's reign, utter confusion prevailed. The succession of the king aroused an internal crisis; a certain Amunmesse seized power in a situation marked by grave disturbances and several assassinations. Such was the situation at the end of the 19th

dynasty; the transition to the 20th dynasty is full of obscurity and it remains dim until the accession of Ramesses III to power, who will put the country on its feet again. Before this redressing, the situation of Egypt, between the last years of Merenptah and the reign of Ramesses III was violently disturbed.

Such an awareness of the political events leads one to wonder if the general cataclysms that are related by the Bible before the Exodus and supposed—in all likelihood—to have occurred during Merenptah's reign, would have not been at the origin of the major and prolonged disturbances which followed them.

The Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign and the debate about the word "Israil"

The text of this stela may be the most debated among the inscriptions of the Ramesside Period. It is not that points of political history evoked by this stela are discussed—several victorious campaigns of the beginning of the reign are recalled. The interest and the debate which follows concerns the stela's particularity; it contains the one and unique mention of "*Israil*" in old Egyptian. The word being written with alphabetic ideograms, there is no question about the reading of the word. But was "*Israil*" a land? Did it designate a people? Could one find indications concerning the history of the Hebrews in Egypt and especially about the departure of the Israelites? Could the Exodus be located in time through this word on the stela? All these questions were posed when, at the end of the 19th century, this stela was discovered.

In 1895, Flinders Petrie, excavating in the Necropolis of Thebes, not far from the Ramesseum, (Funerary Temple of Ramesses II), found, in the ruins of the Funerary Temple of Merenptah, two pieces providing information about the reign of this pharaoh: a statue that, although mutilated, is the best representation of the sovereign—known until now—and the famous stela.

Both antiques are today kept at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. The granite stela, about three meters in length and one meter and a half in width, was engraved on both sides. For, Amenhotep III had used it at first for the recording of a long text, and later Merenptah ordered taking

it from a temple of the former along with other materials, with a view to recording the victories of the beginning of his reign.

In 1896, the German Egyptologist Wilhem Spiegelberg made a long study of the text whose many words were discussed, among them the word "*Israil*." The authors who resumed the interpretations during the 20th century did not have unanimous opinions about the meaning, but most of them had given great importance to this stela in their attempt at locating the Exodus in time. We must notice that, in fact, they were generally much more concerned about the location of this one event in time, than, through a general study of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, to be in a position to insert it in the whole results concerning other stages of this stay. To take into account the real meaning of the word might have been useful to arrive at more logical conclusions....

For most of the authors, the sentence where the word "*Israil*" appears brought the decisive proof that the Exodus had occurred before the fifth year of Merenptah's reign (the Hebrews then being in "the land of Israel"), while others—unfortunately rare—thought that this interpretation was wrong; the word, on the contrary, suggesting that the Exodus was still to come since "the community of the descendants of Jacob-Israel" was at that time in Egypt, without possession of a land, of course.

Since, during the last years, I have had the privilege of collecting documentation provided by different disciplines, leading to the location in time of various stages of the stay in Egypt, among them the Exodus, I shall not use this stela as an argument in favor of any hypothesis. The problem of the interpretation of the meaning of "*Israil*" is to be solved in conformity with what the grammar of the hieroglyphs firmly established. Unfortunately, it appears that some authors chose an interpretation simply to avoid contradiction with their preconceived idea of the occurrence of the Exodus during the life of Ramesses II (who would not have died during the event).

The interpretations given to the word "Israil"

The text of the stela is long. As far as the word "*Israil*" is concerned, only the passage listing a series of victories of the king and

As for the word "*Israil*," its alphabetic ideograms are read on the left of the ideogram meaning "foreign," the latter gives to "*Israil*" the quality of not being Egyptian (living in Egypt is not at all excluded, but, by itself it does not mean a country).

On the right side of this sort of rod meaning "foreign," there is an ideogram representing a man and a woman sitting down and below them three vertical strokes indicating the plural.

Therefore, "*Israil*" not being followed by a determinative designating a country (like in the seven other mentions of cities or lands), necessarily means a community of men and women; this difference is noted by many Egyptologists and commentators on the Bible, among them: A. and R. Neher, P. Montet, E. Stein, Father de Vaux, Father P. Couroyer, etc.

Since, out of the eight proper names of the stela, seven of them are followed by an identical determinative while only one is followed by a totally different ideogram having another specific meaning, one might suppose that the authors would have been led to agree that all the proper names could not designate the same kind of object; i.e., all of them could not designate a land. Therefore, it is more than surprising to notice that Father de Vaux, for example—who firmly supported the hypothesis "*Ramesses II, pharaoh of the Exodus*," a hypothesis implying the presence of the Hebrews in the land of Israel during Merenptah's reign—cannot accept the meaning of "foreign community of men and women, descendants of Jacob-Israel" but upholds the meaning "land of Israel." How can one explain such a refusal? Very simply for Father de Vaux: this is the result of the carelessness of the engraver of the stela, who introduced an improper determinative (*Ancient History of Israel*, op.cit. p.366). What a lack of care for a man engraving a list of victories of his sovereign! And the stela would have been put in the Funerary Temple of the Pharaoh—for eternity, of course—without a correction!

In the sentence related to "*Israil*" on the stela, whose translation quoted here is "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not," what exactly would have meant the hieroglyphic term translated by "seed?" Most of the authors suggest seeds of grains, in view of another harvest, supposing that Pharaoh would have laid waste to Israel by destroying the people's seed in store. Maybe, this seed was not related to grains, and there could be another meaning of a pharaoh laying waste to the community of Israel.

Before examining this question, we must note that, in the translation quoted above, a possessive is joined to the word "seed," since in the hieroglyphic text, an appropriate suffix is added to the word for the same purpose.

This suffix is masculine. And, in old Egyptian, the gender of the suffix is in accord, not with the possessed object, but with the possessor (like in English). On the line reproducing the hieroglyphic text of the sentence, this suffix is at the right extremity; the ideogram represents what is called by specialists the "horned viper" (letter F, masculine suffix). In hieroglyphs, a name designating a community of people is masculine, while a name designating a country is feminine. Thus, this masculine suffix could not have been utilized related to a feminine name, like the name of a land. Very likely, this grammatical aspect had escaped the authors of the misinterpretation of the word "*Israil*" of the stela.

The real meaning of "*Israil*" in the stela is "community of the descendants of Israel," in close conformity with the Hebraic word and the history of the Patriarchs. One knows well that Israel was a surname given to Jacob after the episode of the Jabboq (Genesis 32:23-33); in memory of the great ancestor, his descendants were called "Sons of Israel" or simply "Israel"; this name finally designated the community of his descendants before their departure from Egypt.

How Merenptah laid waste to Israel according to the stela

Nobody debated that Israel was ruined, but the means of coercion in order to arrive at this result could be questioned.

"Seed," in English, may mean the part of a plant that contains the embryo that will grow into a new plant, or descendants, posterity, as well. The same meanings appear in Old Egyptian ("p.r.t." in the stela), as P. Montet noted (*Egypt and the Bible*, op.cit. p.30). The precise meaning depends upon the determinative which follows the word.

Like in other hieroglyphic texts, the word "seed" can be interpreted here with one sense or another (See references given by R.O. Faulkner in his classical dictionary published by Oxford University Press, 1988, p.91). The text of the stela might mean that Pharaoh laid waste to the community of Israel by destroying the seed of grains they had in store in

Egypt. But there is another possible meaning, as suggested by Emily Stein, from the Department of Egyptology of the Hebraic University of Jerusalem (Review of the Department, vol.1, 1981-1982, p.156). This author has drawn a parallel between the sentence of the stela concerning Israel and the order given by Pharaoh: "Every son that is born to the Hebrews, you shall cast into the Nile." (Exodus 1:22) Thus, several centuries before the first written record of a biblical text, an Egyptian document dating back to the fifth year of Merenptah's reign, would have mentioned the odious genocide of new-born male Hebrews who were the "holders of the posterity" of Israel, a genocide which afflicted their community in Egypt.

This is no more than a hypothesis. The essential to be emphasized is that one cannot give to the word "*Israil*" of the stela the meaning of a land; the word obviously designated the descendants of Jacob-Israel still in Egypt in the fifth year of Merenptah's reign. Therefore, no deduction can be drawn about a departure from Egypt of the Hebrews before the reign of this pharaoh.

The stela of Israel did not suggest the least clue allowing positioning of the Exodus during the reign of Ramesses II. It was deeply erroneous to imagine that "*Israil*" had designated a land, when it was obvious that the word designated the community of the descendants of Jacob-Israel. The divergent interpretations of "*Israil*" that were given were in fact in relation with what was previously supposed about the position in time of the Exodus.

We must remember that the stela was uncovered in 1895 by Flinders Petrie whose reading of the Bible in the light of firmly established Egyptological data had led him to be convinced that Merenptah was the pharaoh of the Exodus. This was in total accordance with the opinions of K.R. Lepsius (1849) and many other prominent Egyptologists. Before the masterly study of the stela by Spiegelberg (1896), F. Petrie had published in the *Contemporary Review* (issue of May 1896, p.620), a translation in English of the stela, in collaboration with his colleague F.L. Griffith. A month later, in the French *Journal des Débats* (June 14, 1896), the famous Egyptologist G. Maspero had given his agreement to the view that "the Israelites" were concerned and "they had lost their posterity" (Reference:

F. Vigouroux, in *La Bible et les découvertes modernes* (*The Bible and Modern Discoveries*), IV, Sixth edition 1896, p.682).

No doubt both authors had come to agreement about the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt during the fifth year of Merenptah's reign, the French author having mentioned in addition the "attempt" of the pharaoh "at annihilating the descendants of Israel." For G. Maspero, the hieroglyphic word was the equivalent of the biblical one.

The diverse acquisitions of modern times lead one to think that the conclusions come to by many prominent Egyptologists of the 19th century were undoubtedly exact.

7. The Plagues of Egypt

In each preceding chapter of the present work dealing with a stage of the stay in Egypt of the Hebrews, we have been in a position to corroborate the narrations of the Scripture with known events of the history of the country. On the contrary, the plagues of Egypt related by the Bible cannot lead to such a comparison.

Could an explanation of this fact be found in a particular tendency for the ancient Egyptian documents to have reported events in a very selective manner? Most of the time, these documents only narrate all that is favorable to the political authorities; the great majority of the documents at the disposal of the historians especially refer to the glory of the almighty sovereign and not at all to occurrences which turned out very badly for the country. In the relating of battles for example, the reverses are carefully overshadowed (as when Ramesses II fought at Qadesh against the Hittites where despite the bravery of the pharaoh, the so-called victory seems to have been high-priced; nonetheless, the text of the famous bas-relief of Abu Simbel only glorifies the king).

The awareness of facts of this kind leads us to think that one cannot expect to find in the Egyptian literature the relating of events as disastrous for the country as what the Bible narrates concerning the plagues, the more so since these cataclysms, in the end, afflicted the pharaoh himself, those closely related to him and the people who were able to observe the powerlessness of the sovereign facing catastrophes.

The unique parallel which might be suggested lies in the hypothesis situating the occurrence of events of this kind in a period of well-known great disturbances, such as—as far as the Ramesside Period is concerned—the last quarter of the 13th century B.C. (end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th dynasties). Unfortunately, the documents concerning this time are very rare and imprecise.

Prelude to the narration of the plagues of Egypt

The Lord had given Moses supernatural powers with the purpose of his trying to persuade Pharaoh of the divine character of his mission. In the narration of the burning bush, we read that God commanded

Moses to cast his staff on the ground, and it became a serpent; and when Moses took the serpent by the tail, it became a staff again in his hand. (Exodus 4:1-5) Another sign of this kind: the hand of Moses becoming as white as snow and afterwards being restored like the rest of his body. (Exodus 4:6-7)

Later Aaron was invested with the same power in his staff. So, standing before Pharaoh, Aaron cast down the staff and it became a serpent. Then, Pharaoh summoned the sorcerers and magicians of Egypt and, "they, also... did the same by their secret arts. For every man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs." (Exodus 7:8-12)

Such a biblical narrative arouses perplexity, for, if one easily understands the making of miracles by the staff of Aaron, it seems very strange that the magicians of Pharaoh would have possessed *the same supernatural power* to make animals—serpents, in the English version of the Bible—suddenly appear, exactly as Aaron did by miracle.

It is well known that the ancient Egyptians believed in magic. G. Lefebure, in his *Novels and Tales of Egypt (Romans et Contes de l'Egypte)*, has reported that the Papyrus West gave as examples of such a belief:

...to set again a head cut, to find something that was lost by turning the waters of a lake upside down, to change a crocodile made of wax into a living animal which then takes somebody who is guilty to the depths..., etc. (Pierre Montet, op.cit. p.90)

This papyrus also relates many stories concerning snakes....

Undoubtedly, the Bible writer has obviously introduced into his texts legends of Egyptian folklore.

Plague number 1. Blood (Exodus 7:14-25)

The biblical narration relates the order given by God to Moses to go to Pharaoh and wait for him by the river's bank, in order to make another request to let the people go. Moses said to Pharaoh that he has in his hand a staff which might turn the waters of the Nile to blood.

Aaron joins Moses; Pharaoh knew that the former had the same supernatural powers.

Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews go. Then Aaron lifted the staff up, struck the water and it was turned to blood. The Nile became foul and the fish died. But the magicians of Egypt did the same, and Pharaoh did not take seriously what he had observed, despite everywhere in the country the water becoming blood that invaded rivers, canals, ponds and vessels in the houses....

One cannot help questioning oneself about the reality of the details of this narration. Rabbi Elie Munk has written: "The hypothesis of an event existing in nature cannot be dismissed, for this plague as for the other ones." The commentators also question themselves about what the magicians did. "Where did they get water, since the Bible says that all the waters of Egypt were changed into blood?" (*The Voice of the Torah, Exodus*, op.cit. p.77-78). Moreover, the magicians of Pharaoh are related as having the same supernatural powers as Aaron, a detail which cannot be easily accepted....

Does this plague not suggest a parallel with what occurred each year when the Nile floods happened? During a certain stage of the inundation, the waters were colored red by the sediments coming down from Upper Egypt and the Abyssinian Lakes (at that time they were not stopped by dams, like in our days). This stage succeeded the initial step when the Nile became at first green, due to the pushing of the flood on the stagnant waters of the marshes. So, the Nile was successively green then red. The differences in color were, nonetheless, more apparent in Upper Egypt than in the delta where Moses and Aaron dwelled, in all likelihood.

One may think that these natural changes were able to strike the imagination of people to such an extent that they suggested a comparison with the color of blood. One knows what was, in ancient times, the benefit for the soil of having been regularly impregnated by sediments fertilizing it; today the sediments cannot modify the color of the water of the river, since they are stopped by dams that regulate the flow, obliging the peasants to use fertilizers. Unfortunately today the eco-system of the Valley of the Nile is different from that of ancient times, when the periodical revival of life was intense, in the delta particularly, marked by the proliferation of living things that need water: frogs, insects, gnats,

mosquitoes... etc. We shall have to remember this about the narrations of the plagues relating diverse proliferations; there is no doubt that the Bible deals with the consequences of an exaggeration of the features of these natural events, like stench of waters, death of the fish, etc.

The classical Egyptian literature—*much before the occurrence of the plagues*—had also dealt with what might be only an exaggeration of several natural events, affording very severe damage to the country. In the “Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage”—a well-known text dating back to the Middle Kingdom (Papyrus of Leiden 344)—multiple disasters that might strike Egypt are described, among them one which suggests a precise comparison with the text of plague number 1 concerning rivers and blood. From the translation by Alan H. Gardiner, I extract the following passage: “The plague is throughout the land; blood is everywhere; the river is blood.” (2:5-6 and 10) The last detail holds attention in a reflection about the event of the same kind related in the Bible.

The Christian commentators, while posing questions about the capabilities of the magicians of Pharaoh, emphasized that the final biblical text had resulted from composition with elements coming from several sources. For, they were able to discern here two main traditions which were expressed in the Yahvist version and the Sacerdotal version, while what concerns the staff of Moses would have been brought by a third one, the Elohist version. This amalgam of traditions has been particularly emphasized by Father P. Couroyer, who was director of the Biblical School of Jerusalem, in his translation of the book of Exodus (op.cit. p.48). In this way, one may explain the existence of details which appear to be obscure or contradictory, as in the cases of the narrations of the other plagues.

Plague number 2. Frogs (Exodus 8:1-15)

Pharaoh was threatened with the proliferation of frogs, but this had no effect.

Then, through Moses, God ordered Aaron to stretch out his hand with his staff over the rivers, the canals and the people, and cause frogs to come upon the land and invade all the country as far as the houses and courtyards... etc. And Moses had come to an agreement with

Pharaoh: he would allow the people to go, if God would destroy the frogs leaving only those in the Nile. Despite the Lord acting according to the word of Moses, Pharaoh, once more, refused to liberate the Hebrews.

As related about the preceding plague, the magicians of Pharaoh had been able to make the frogs proliferate....

Such capabilities of the magicians suggest the same remark as before about the blood.

Plague number 3. Gnats (Exodus 8:16-19)

For the Revised Standard Version, it is a proliferation of gnats. For the Hebrew text, the translation of “kinnim” or “kinnam” might be “vermin.”

After Aaron had struck the dust of the earth, gnats came on men and beasts, throughout the land of Egypt. The magicians tried, by their secret arts, to bring forth gnats, but they could not and they said: “This is the finger of God”; Pharaoh would not listen to them.

Plague number 4. Swarms of flies (Exodus 8:20-32)

The Hebrew text of the Bible mentions “wild beasts” instead of “flies.”

Moses said to Pharaoh that, if he would not let his people go, swarms of flies would invade Egypt, except the land where Moses’ brethren dwelt. Later, when Egypt had been ruined by the flies, Pharaoh suggested letting the Hebrews sacrifice to their God within the land. Moses could not accept this proposal, and finally Pharaoh accepted allowing them to sacrifice in the wilderness. The agreement was made and Moses prayed to the Lord to remove the swarms of flies from Egypt. Then the Lord did as Moses asked, but Pharaoh did not let the people go.

Plague number 5. Death of the cattle (Exodus 9:1-7)

Once more Pharaoh is threatened: if he does not let the Hebrew people go, all the cattle of Egypt will die. After the refusal of Pharaoh,

the cattle in the field, the horses, the asses, the camels, the herds, and the flocks died, except what belonged to the people of Israel. But Pharaoh persisted in refusing the departure of the Hebrews.

For the Christian commentators, this narration was composed according to the Yahvist tradition, which dated back to about one millennium after the occurrence of the events. Nonetheless, in this Yahvist text, camels are mentioned among the cattle (Exodus 9:3), whereas today one knows that camels (dromedaries as well) only became domesticated after the beginning of the Christian Era. This problem was dealt with in the chapter concerning the entry into Egypt and Joseph; as in the book of Genesis, the mention of camels was undoubtedly introduced to the book of Exodus during the Christian Era.

Plague number 6. Boils and sores (Exodus 9:8-12)

This is a short narration of boils and sores grown on beasts and men, including the magicians of Pharaoh, as well as the other Egyptians. Despite the occurrence of this plague, the Hebrews remained enslaved.

Plague number 7. Hail (Exodus 9:13-35)

In the biblical narration, the threat of a heavy hail is preceded by a warning of God to Pharaoh that Moses had to convey:

By now I could have put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth; but, for this purpose have I let you live, to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. (Exodus 9:15-16)

I quote this warning—which obviously concerns the plagues having previously occurred—because this passage has been mentioned by certain commentators in connection with events which will happen later. This warning is not at all referring to any indulgence God was granting

Pharaoh, at the time of the Exodus, for example, in order to save his life, like certain authors have asserted.

A heavy hail fell, such as had never been seen in Egypt, when Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; thunder and fire rained down on the earth, struck down men, beasts, every plant, and shattered every tree, except in the land where the people of Israel were dwelling.

Then Pharaoh confessed: "I have sinned this time; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong." (Exodus 9:27) And he promised to let the Hebrews go. But when the thunder and the hail ceased, after Moses had prayed to the Lord, Pharaoh sinned yet again and he did not let the people of Israel go.

Those who are aware of the Egyptian climate know that hail, although rare, is not exceptional. Pierre Montet, in his book (op.cit. p.97), has related that, in 1945, he observed a fall of hailstones as large as nuts, destroying the harvest and injuring men and beasts. In 1966, heavy hailstones fell in the delta. What the Bible narrates might be no more than a natural event abnormally exaggerated, like other atmospheric disturbances when the sky became black (which could have persisted 2 days, as in 1930, according to what Pierre Montet observed). Other plagues—like plague number 9 (darkness)—might have been natural cataclysms of a very high intensity.

Plague number 8. Locusts (Exodus 10:1-20)

Pharaoh seemed to have been impressed when Moses and Aaron threatened to bring locusts. But Moses insisted on receiving permission for the Hebrews to leave Egypt with their young and their old, their sons and daughters, their flocks and herds. Pharaoh, for a moment, feigned to accept the departure of the men, but Moses and Aaron were driven out from Pharaoh's presence. (Exodus 10:11)

Then the Lord brought an east wind and swarms of locusts upon Egypt, covering the face of the whole land. Not a green thing remained and Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in haste and said: "I have sinned against the Lord and you." (Exodus 10:16) They prayed to God and the Lord sent a very strong wind which drove the locusts into the Red Sea.

One knows well that, when the east wind brings locusts from the Sinai, this natural cataclysm causes significant damage to the fields.

Plague number 9. Darkness (Exodus 10:21-29)

For three days, there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt, but the people of Israel had light where they dwelt. This might have been the consequence of the preceding plague of locusts, a well-known disturbance which might also have been caused by the accumulation of dust in the atmosphere.

Plague number 10. Death of the first-born (Exodus 11:1-10 and 12:29-36)

God announced to Moses what the last plague would be. It was to afflict all the first-born, men and animals, all the Egyptian families including the family of Pharaoh whose first-born, appointed to sit upon the throne, would die. Afterwards, the Hebrews would be able to depart from Egypt.

The biblical text does not express whether the departure would be merely permitted or, rather, demanded, since we read: "The Lord said to Moses: 'Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence; when he lets you go, he will drive you away completely.'" (Exodus 11:1)

Following this passage, the biblical text deals with prescriptions about the Passover (Exodus 12:1-28), the end of chapter XII describing the death of all the first-born and the departure of the Israelites after a stay of 430 years in Egypt. (Exodus 12:40)

Comments on the plagues of Egypt

Nobody could reasonably take literally the biblical text about the plagues; one can discern many unlikely elements. What are the causes of all this?

No doubt the biblical writers, one after another, very likely acting with good intentions, wanted to bring precision, without considering the validity of their information. Unfortunately, in our days, certain commentators have accepted all the details as being likely, and held very strange estimates as follows; three days of darkness (plague number 9) are supposed—by a commentator of the 20th century—to have provoked the death of four-fifths of the Egyptians, i.e., for him, 2,400,000 persons (from a total number of 3 million approximately!).

Appraisals of that kind lead those who systematically disparage any Scripture to declare that the proof is apparent that it contains absurd tales. On the contrary, it appears that the Bible does not deserve such a severe judgment, for, besides untenable assertions, it relates events which are in close conformity with historical facts or with modern discoveries in the field of archaeology or other disciplines.

On the other hand, it would be unwise, as well, to uphold that a rigid logic binds the plagues to one another, every plague succeeding the preceding one, like the effect does the cause, the knowledge acquired by the natural sciences enabling us to establish strict connections having been coordinated in time. This hypothesis was suggested by G. Hort in 1957 and 1958, and reported by Father de Vaux in his book (*op.cit.* p.340); through a bacterial process, a Nile flood would have caused the death of such a number of frogs that the gnats would have proliferated and killed the cattle; then, boils and sores would have grown on the beasts. In this way, the author said that every detail of the biblical narration until plague number 6 is verified. Thence, he intercalates hail and locusts in the succession of the natural events. As for the darkness, it is supposed to have happened after the flood level had fallen, when the dust left by the waters on the earth is picked up by the first wind that comes along. And if the Israelites are spared, the reason is that they dwell in a valley which is perpendicular to the Nile and, in this way, protected from the wind....

The imaginative construction of G. Hort cannot explain, of course, the death of the first-born.... Nonetheless, such a queer hypothesis could impress certain minds, the more so since a chronology of the successive events had been suggested by the author: beginning in July (the month of the Nile flood), to the end of the plagues in March or April (which remains to be confirmed). Father de Vaux has noticed that this

“unlikely” hypothesis was nonetheless reported with favor by K.A. Kitchen (the English Egyptologist whose works about the inscriptions of the Ramesside Period are known all over the world!).

More than being a narration of events which might be connected one with another, the Scriptural text is, in fact, an amalgam of data brought by the main traditions, according to the conclusions of the research carried out by the Biblical School of Jerusalem; the Yahvist tradition and the Sacerdotal tradition appear in all the narrations, whereas the Elohist tradition is not easily discerned. Each tradition brought its proper information in the course of several centuries; thence, the differences or the contradictions in the narrations of the events.

There is not a single tradition which relates all the plagues; the Yahvist tradition relates seven (or six) plagues, the Sacerdotal tradition four (or five), the same for the Elohist tradition. All of them, nonetheless, relate the death of the first-born. (Father P. Couroyer, *op.cit.* p.47)

In other respects, it seems that, beyond certain details, the whole series of the narrations of the plagues, might suggest a general significance; A. and R. Neher, in their book (*op.cit.* p.119-123) have emphasized the gradual expressions of the divine teaching to be drawn. Their division into 3 groups of 3 plagues, in addition to the last one, being the death of the first born, leads the authors to consider the existence of a progression in the impact obtained on those whom they reached. Thus, the result of plague number 3 is to persuade the magicians that their inability to bring forth gnats shows that, “This is the finger of God.” In the second and the third groups of plagues, the magicians do not intervene.

As for Pharaoh, he made progressive concessions under the pressure of events. At first, he accepted that the Hebrews sacrifice to their Lord in Egypt (Exodus 8:25), thereafter he consented to the departure of the men alone (Exodus 10:11), and in the end, of the whole Israelite people (Exodus 10:24). Through details which are related by the biblical writers according to their peculiar manner of composing the text, the series of narrations made clear that Pharaoh is constantly defending his personal interest and the interest of the administration of the country; he is quite worried about keeping the enslaved Hebrews as workers,

and—if the men leave Egypt—about holding in custody the flocks and herds of the Israelites which were spared. (Exodus 10:24) It is only after the very cruel affliction caused by the death of his first-born that Pharaoh is resigned to allowing the Hebrews to leave Egypt with all that they possess. In the end, he will have to resign himself to his fate; he will lose his life during the Exodus.

8. The Exodus: the Final Event of Merenptah's Reign

The biblical narration (Exodus 13:17 to 15:21)

As in the narration of the plagues, the biblical text that we now possess is an amalgam of the three main traditions we have previously quoted, this amalgam being responsible for variations. In addition, about several details, there might be differences between the Hebrew text and the Greek text (the Septuagint), and it may happen that the translator of one version takes the liberty of introducing in his text a word extracted from another one.

The first two verses of the Revised Standard Version introduce the narration of the Exodus, as follows:

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said "Lest the people repent when they see war, and return to Egypt." But God led the people by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. (Exodus 13:17-18)

This passage suggests two comments:

- a) This text leads one to think that the Exodus had not been an expulsion ("Pharaoh let the people go"). It seems to be in contradiction with the Hebrew text (according to the translation by Rabbi Elie Munk, in *The Voice of the Torah, Exodus*, op.cit. p.131) and the Greek version which contains the word "*exapostello*" whose meaning is "to send back, to dismiss." That might mean that Pharaoh at first had expressed his will to see the Hebrews leave the country; but, nonetheless, he might have changed his mind, since we read, "When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?'"

(Exodus 14:5) (We must note that this text is present in the Greek version which precisely suggests that the Exodus was an expulsion.)

- b) The English text says that the Hebrews went toward the Red Sea. This is in conformity with the Greek text, but not at all with the Hebrew text which, instead of "Red Sea," mentions "*yam suf*" whose meaning is "sea of reeds" (despite that the above quoted Rabbi has translated it in the French edition as "Red Sea"). For the same passage (Exodus 13:18), the French translators of the Bible edited by the Biblical School of Jerusalem and the authors of the French Ecumenical Translation have written "sea of reeds," in conformity with the basic Hebrew text.

The narration of the departure and the miracle of the sea read as follows:

After having taken the bones of Joseph with them, Moses and the Hebrews moved on. Then Pharaoh...

...made ready his chariots and took his army with him, and six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them... and they pursued the people of Israel as they went forth defiantly.... The Egyptians... overlooked them encamped at the sea. The people of Israel lifted up their eyes... and they were in great fear.... Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back... and made the sea dry land and the waters were divided.... The Egyptians pursued, and went in after them in the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen. (Exodus 14:6-23)

The passage of the narration which follows must be emphasized, since it appears not to be in conformity with the widespread hypothesis of the wrecking of the Egyptians only through a drowning. On the contrary, there happened an active intervention of the Lord who "discomfited the Egyptians" by "clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove

heavily.” (Exodus 14:24-25) In chapter XV, the text alludes to another violent action.

Then, after the Lord had...

...routed the Egyptians in the midst of the sea, the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not so much as one of them remained... the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea... Israel saw the Egyptian dead upon the seashore. (Exodus 14:27-30)

We will see later the importance of noticing the last detail.

Despite that chapter XV only relates the “Song of Deliverance,” it contains a major account of what happened, due to the intervention of the Lord, as the biblical text makes mention of it: “Pharaoh’s chariots and his host he cast into the sea... they went down into the depths like a stone... they sank as lead in the mighty waters.” (Exodus 15:4-5, 10)

These precise details lead us to think that such physical forces, released against the Egyptians, necessarily caused severe bodily injuries. These details of the biblical text will be called to mind later and compared with the findings of the medical investigations of Pharaoh’s remains.

Remarks made by several commentators

Since the biblical text narrates that Pharaoh could have at his disposal a host of 600 picked chariots and, in addition, an imprecise number of other chariots and horsemen, one is perplexed, like Rabbi Elie Munk (op.cit. p.143), about the possibilities for him to have found such a number of horses after the occurrence of plague number 5 which would have deprived the country of all cattle. But does not the contradiction concern what is related about the plague? Could not the damage caused by the plague have been exaggerated?

What would have been the process of parting of the waters, allowing the Hebrews to walk on dry ground to cross the obstacle of the sea? For the French commentators of the *Ecumenical Translation of the Bible* (op.cit. p.156), the traditions alluded to different explanations: the

Yahvist tradition suggested the east wind (Exodus 14:21), the Sacerdotal tradition the hand of Moses (Exodus 14:26), the Elohist tradition the angel of God. (Exodus, 14:19)

Was the departure of the Israelite people initially tolerated in the mind of Pharaoh? Thus, we must remember that Pharaoh was cruelly afflicted by the death of his first-born (plague number 10); then he apparently made the decision to let Moses and the Hebrews go:

And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also!" And the Egyptians were urgent with the people, to send them out of the land in haste; for they said "We are all dead men." (Exodus 12:31-33)

On the other hand, the logic leads us to think that the departure of the Hebrews would have brought great damage to the country, since Pharaoh and the Egyptian authorities needed to keep the enslaved Hebrews as workers for their construction. For many commentators, like Father de Vaux (*op.cit.* p.352), it is most likely that the Hebrews had voluntarily fled Egypt; for a long time they had wanted to leave the country, and the mission of Moses was precisely to request their liberation from Pharaoh, in order to make the enslavement come to an end, whereas Pharaoh had economical reasons to prolong it.

Moreover, Father de Vaux, in his book (*op.cit.* p.353-358), has suggested a third hypothesis: "Maybe there were more than a unique Exodus: groups of Hebrews might have been expelled, other groups of Israelites might have fled from Egypt," and that at different periods. This twofold hypothesis might have a parallel with what the Yahvist and Elohist traditions suggested about the routes of their journey: the former through the north along the seashore, the latter through the wilderness. The first Exodus would have concerned tribes which, during the 18th dynasty, would have been expelled toward the north to reach Palestine directly; much later, the Hebrews who had remained in Egypt would have been driven by Moses through the Sinai, deliberately leaving Egypt and escaping the enslavement due to the miracle of the sea.

How numerous were the number of Hebrews fleeing Egypt?

In their book *Biblical History of the Israelite People* (op.cit. p.127), A. and R. Neher have written:

This Exodus certainly is the most extraordinary migration of history; a crowd of two million, maybe three million people, together depart the same day, guided by a unique leader, with a very small quantity of provisions for their journey.

Such an estimate of the Hebrew people fleeing Egypt is given by many other commentators who refer to what the Bible asserts: "about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children." (Exodus 12:37) This passage is considered as being an addition by a "Sacerdotal" writer to the Yahvist version; one knows that the Sacerdotal tradition had a liking for genealogies and figures. In fact, the number of people concerned here is not credible at all.

One must remember what the biblical estimate of the group of Hebrews entering Egypt at the time of Joseph and Jacob was: about 70 men, and additional women and children, i.e., all the members of their families. Those who finally left Egypt were their descendants. No doubt such a small human community would have taken a very long time to become a people of 2 to 3 million inhabitants! Can we imagine that after 430 years they would have been in a position to reach such a size?

Would it be possible to conceive that such considerable masses could have lived in the region of the eastern part of the Nile delta in an area obviously limited? Would it be possible to imagine that such a crowd might have been gathered in a day before leaving Egypt? Moreover, despite the fact that estimates in our days cannot be other than approximate, there is no doubt that the whole population of Egypt was at that time far from reaching the figures suggested by what the Bible said about the Israelites living there.

Facing all these difficulties to admitting the biblical assertion, we may question ourselves about the interpretation given of the Hebrew word "*aleph*," which might also mean "family group" or "group of individuals" instead of "thousand," as it is usually translated. Thus "600

groups” would imply a much more limited crowd, and such an estimate would appear to be much more likely.

As was suggested about the narrations of the plagues, critical reasoning leads us to reject the principle of taking literally all the details of the biblical teachings. For, when certain details are accepted without discernment, without taking into account their possible origin through an amalgam of various traditions, extravagant comments may unfortunately follow. For example, one can read, in remarks made by a contemporary exegete, the quotation of what an ancient commentator had supposed about the estimates of the Hebrew masses fleeing Egypt; the Hebrew mothers had been in such a privileged position that each one would have been able to generate fifty children approximately. The commentator believed in the existence at that time of such high capabilities!

Where might the fleeing Hebrews have approached the “sea?” What was this “sea?”

A priori, the variations which are obvious in the biblical texts might appear as bringing an inextricable confusion. When one only refers to the Revised Standard Version, it seems that no problem exists; in chapters XIII, XIV and XV of the book of Exodus and the Psalms (Psalm 136:13,15), the “sea” in question is the Red Sea. This translation is in complete conformity with the Greek version (the Septuagint), for the book of Exodus as well as for the Psalms (135, instead of 136 in the R.S.V.). But, when attention is drawn to the Hebrew text, one might suppose that there is a problem, the more so since the meanings are not always the same when one reads the original text or translations by certain authors!

Thus, the French translations of the Bible quoted above mention that, in the Hebrew text, the obstacle of the waters is called the “sea” or the “Red Sea” or the “sea of reeds” (“*yam suf*” in Hebrew); the French references are *The Bible translated by the Biblical School of Jerusalem, Exodus* (op.cit. p.72) and *The Ecumenical Translation of the Bible, Old Testament* (op.cit. p.156). And the problem becomes more complex, when one refers to the French translation of the Hebrew text by Rabbi Elie Munk, for the translation of the book of Exodus mentions only “sea” or

“Red Sea” (never “sea of reeds,” either in the text or the comments); this remark concerns the passages when the Hebrews are facing or crossing the obstacle of the waters, for, quite curiously the translator introduces the one and unique mention of “reeds” in his text, and that immediately after the crossing when Moses led the Hebrews onward directly to enter the desert....

What is emphasized by the French authors of translations and comments who are quoted above seems to be of the utmost importance and must be carefully taken into consideration for the following reasons:

It is a fact that a great number of specialists of exegesis have spread the notion that the fleeing Hebrews crossed the Red Sea, from the Egyptian shore to the Sinai Peninsula, through the Gulf of Suez. But there is great difficulty in admitting this when one is aware of the non-existence of reeds in the Gulf itself; this difficulty cannot be raised when one refers only to texts that do not mention the reeds.

A preliminary question must be posed: was the obstacle of the waters really a “sea?” Would it have been possible that a wind was able to dry the “sea,” allowing the Hebrews to find their way across?

How can one find harmony between a crossing of the whole width of the Red Sea and the passage of the Bible saying that, after they had walked on dry ground, the Hebrews “saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore.” (Exodus 14:30) To be in a position to observe the disastrous results of the wrecking of the Egyptians would not have been possible when they had crossed an obstacle as wide as the waters of the Red Sea. From the Sinai Peninsula, how could they have seen the Egyptian seashore, since *the waters had come back upon the pursuing host of Pharaoh*, as God had promised to Moses? (Exodus 14:26) These important objections to what was put forward by many commentators who held the traditional “crossing of the Red Sea,” led us to examine if the quotation by the Bible of several names of places along the road followed by the fleeing Hebrews in Egypt might not bring interesting data to light.

We read: “The people of Israel journeyed from Ramesses to Succoth....” (Exodus 12:37) One knows that the Hebrews dwelt in the eastern part of the delta, close to the site of the capital, Pi-Ramesses, (capital of the Ramesside Period), a city perfectly located today, but Succoth has yet not been located. The next step, which was Etham “on

the edge of the wilderness" has not been located either. Then, the Hebrews would have turned back and encamped in front of Pi-ha-hi'roth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Ba'al-zephon. (Exodus 14:2) Pi-ha-hi'roth, which probably means "mouth of canals" is not located; Migdol means "small fort" (according to the French Ecumenical Translation, Old Testament, op.cit. p.156). As to Ba'al-zephon, it has been suggested, besides other hypotheses, that the meaning might be "the heights which overlooked the small Bitter Lake" (according to the translation of the book of Exodus, edited by the Biblical School of Jerusalem, op.cit, p.74). This place is the last one before the crossing of the "sea," precisely where the pursuing Egyptians caught up with the fleeing Hebrews. (Exodus 14:9) This detail recorded in the Bible might be extremely important, if the location near the small Bitter Lake can be confirmed in a day to come.

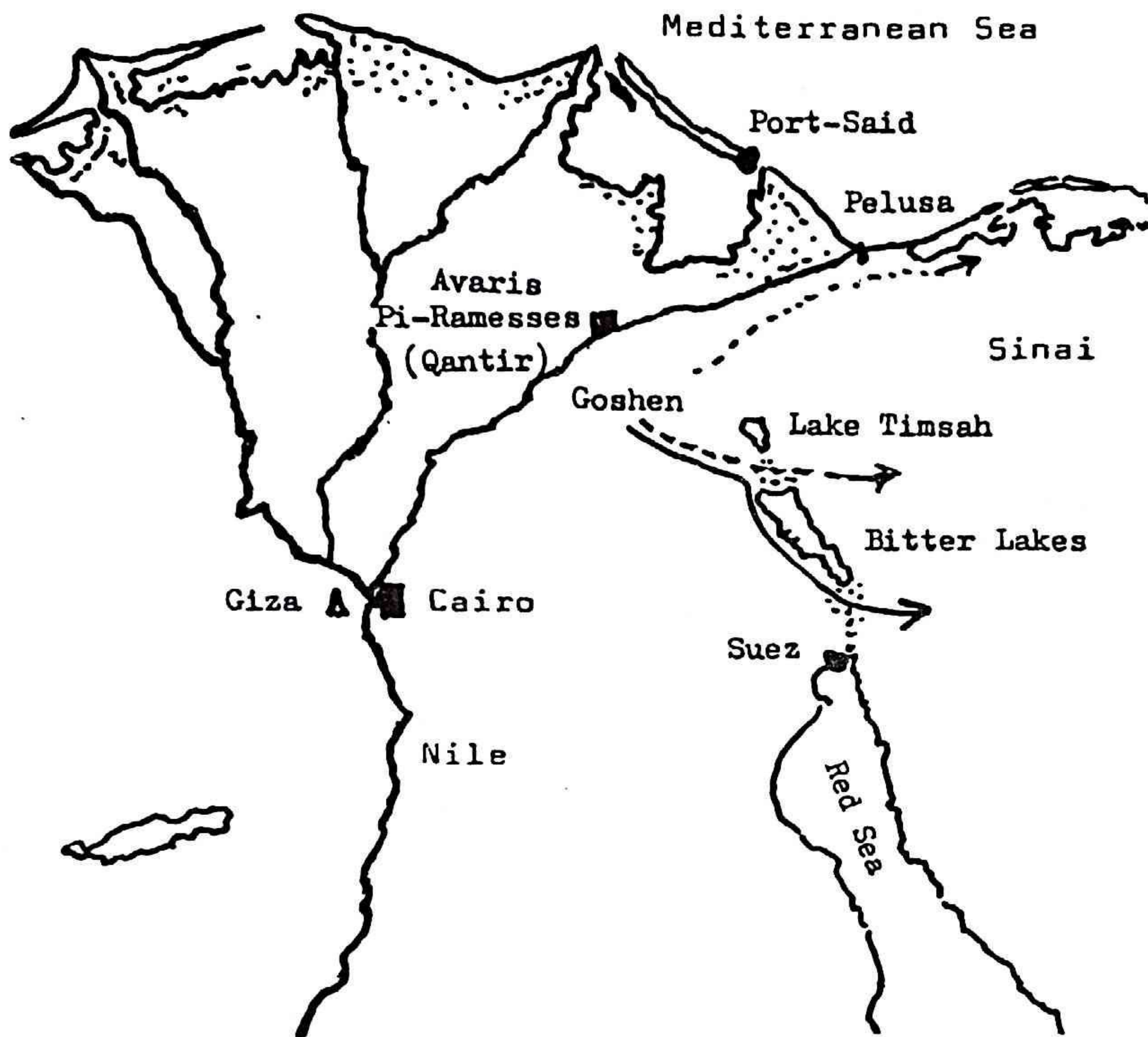
Three ways which might have been possible geographically have been suggested by the authors (see map); the southern way, through the Gulf of Suez itself, where the reeds do not grow, is not tenable for many reasons; the northern way, the way of the Philistines, along the seashore was excluded by God himself because of the danger of war (Exodus 13:17)—today we know that, along this route, there were small fortresses built during the reigns of Sethos I and Merenptah.

The last possibility is a route which is near the Bitter Lakes; in the past, the Bitter Lakes were connected to the Gulf of Suez, by an arm of the Red Sea—in this region there are marshes where reeds grow.

Before the second World War, an inquiry was carried out by an officer of the French Navy, working at the administration of the Suez Canal; the results were reported by Monsignor G. Ricciotti, in his book edited in 1938, *History of Israel*, the French translation of which was published in 1956.

After a careful examination of the ground of this region, the conclusions were as follows:

We think that in the ancient times, more exactly at the time of the Exodus, there was, between the Bitter Lakes and the north of the Gulf of Suez, a connection which could have been dependent upon circumstances or not regular, influenced by the sea-levels; this was enough to



create a real obstacle between Egypt and the desert on its eastern border, without, nonetheless, depriving the event of the Exodus of its miraculous feature.... The passage through lakes, lagoons, canals and marshes could not have been found in places other than the ford between Tell Qulzum and Suez (this would be the main ford) or other ways in the neighborhood of the southern extremity of the small Bitter Lake. (op.cit p.220-221)

In 1975, when I visited Ismailia, I remember that I questioned an agricultural engineer who knew well the region of the Bitter Lakes; he entirely confirmed the above-mentioned conclusions and told me that the “sea of reeds” could not be found in a region other than between Suez and the Bitter Lakes.

Moreover, the Bible teaches us that the Hebrews, after their walking across the obstacle of the waters, had *directly and immediately reached the desert*. After the narration of the Song of Deliverance (Exodus 15:1-22), we read: “Then Moses led Israel onward from the sea of reeds and they went into the wilderness of Shur; they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.” (This translation is in close conformity with the Hebrew text.) We can easily conceive that, if the fleeing Hebrews had to go a long way through the waters in order to cross the whole width of the Red Sea, an account of many occurrences would have been present in the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible does not contain the least teaching about the events which would have happened during the long crossing of the Red Sea, if such a crossing had occurred. Despite that one cannot locate Shur (whose meaning is “Wall”), the most likely hypothesis is that the Hebrews crossed the arm of the Red Sea between the Bitter Lakes and the Gulf of Suez—a region where the reeds grow—and, afterwards, directly entered the Sinai Peninsula.

We must note that a careful reading of the book of Exodus may draw attention to another clue. Chapter XIV of this book relates the crossing of the waters as having occurred during the night, and verse 27 of this chapter says that “the sea returned to its wonted flow when the morning appeared and the Egyptians fled into it.” If the crossing by the Hebrews had been so rapid, they would have necessarily covered only a short distance on dry ground, a distance short enough to have allowed a

them to see the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore, as the Bible says. (Exodus 14:30) Consequently, how could they have crossed the Red Sea itself? To pose the question invites us to examine the topographical data of the region of the Gulf of Suez and its tributaries and to try to find out what they were in the time of these events.

What data might be drawn from the old Egyptian texts?

The "sea," be it the Mediterranean Sea or the Red Sea, was generally designated in hieroglyphs by the word "*W3d-Wr*" (literally "the Great Green"). But the texts also mention another expanse occupied in Egypt by waters, called "*Km-Wr*" (literally "the Great Black"). For specialists in hieroglyphs, the latter expression designated the Bitter Lakes. (References: H. Gauthier, in *Dictionnaire des noms géographiques contenus dans les textes hiéroglyphiques*, V, 202; and R.O. Faulkner, in *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, published by the Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1988, p.286) In the *Revue Biblique (Biblical Review)*, (1900, IX, p.77), Father A. Lagrange, trying to locate where the Hebrews crossed the waters, emphasized the importance of this ancient geographical data. For, "the Great Green" and "the Great Black" were connected in ancient times; they contained salt water and the same mollusks found in the Bitter Lakes and the Red Sea. In the tale of Sinuhe (12th Dynasty, i.e., several centuries before the Ramesside Period) allusions are made to the salt water of the region of "the Great Black."

This basin of "the Great Black" of ancient times has today left Timsah Lake and the two Bitter Lakes. For more than a century, the Suez Canal has artificially connected Timsah Lake to the Mediterranean Sea, the three lakes one to another, and the Bitter Lakes to the Red Sea. But what exactly were the natural connections in the time of Moses?

In fact, we do not possess precise evidence of such an interconnection at that time, but we know what the conditions were before Moses and what they were a long time after the Exodus. So, during the reign of Ptolemy II (3rd century B.C.) an inscription was engraved showing that vessels could sail from the Bitter Lakes to the Red Sea; it was discovered by A. Naville in the region of Pithom.

When they were facing the obstacle of the waters in their flight from Egypt, the Hebrews had to make a choice between three routes (other than the Red Sea) in order to be sheltered from the pursuers—God led them to find the most convenient. A path on dry ground

through the middle of one of the lakes would have been too long (the same for a passage through the Red Sea). The only routes over a reduced width would have been crossing the interconnections between the lakes or between the lakes and the Red Sea. These passages might have allowed the Hebrews—after their crossing of the obstacle of the waters—to see the dead Egyptians upon the seashore, like the Bible says. (Exodus 14:30) Precisely there, the reeds grow, these reeds that are evoked in the biblical text.

Experiments made in the past by very important persons are to be reported.

During his preliminary studies in Egypt before the digging of the Suez Canal, the promoter of the enterprise, the French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps, remembered the event of the crossing of the “sea” by the Hebrews while he was preparing his plans. And he tried to use his geographical findings in an attempt to locate where the religious event had possibly occurred. In a paper read before the French Academy of Sciences, on June 22, 1874 (*Comptes rendus hebdomadaires*, 1874, p.1720-1747) and in a lecture delivered eight years before about the Suez Canal (reference in F. Vigouroux, op.cit., II, 1896, p.383-385), de Lesseps suggested that the Hebrews, after having left the city of Pi-Hahiroth (Exodus, 14:1-9), might have easily reached a marshy zone in the neighborhood of the Bitter Lakes. He supposed that there the occurrence of a storm miraculously sent by God might have sheltered the Hebrews from the Egyptians. For, in 1854, de Lesseps, camping there, had observed that during a storm the difference in the level of the waters could be so significant that such a supposition appeared to him to be very likely.

Before de Lesseps, another Frenchman whose career was illustrious had wanted to explore the possibility of a rapid passage between Egypt and Sinai, trying to repeat the route followed by Moses, but in the opposite direction. During his expedition in Egypt in 1799, General Bonaparte performed this experiment: he stepped into one of the two fords to the north of the city of Suez, for it was considered as possibly “inducing a gain in distance of more than eight kilometres” during the passage. In spite of this benefit, the General had a narrow escape: he almost got drowned! Otherwise, Emperor Napoleon would not have

made his mark on history. This episode is narrated in the *Description de l'Egypte* (1809, I, p.309-311) by du Bois Aymé.

In our days, most of the Christian commentators do not dwell at length on the precise location of the "sea" miraculously crossed. Moreover, the mention of the "sea of reeds" (*yam suf* in Hebrew, does not seem to have been considered as particularly significant. Nonetheless, the French authors of the *Ecumenical Translation of the Bible: Old Testament* (op.cit. p.156) mention the reeds, thinking that the expression, "sea of reeds" might have designated "a kind of Gulf on the Mediterranean Sea... soaking into lands where the reeds grow... as well as the Red Sea." Other authors seem to have given up any study of the question. So, in his book (op.cit. 1971, p.354-364), Father de Vaux, formerly eminent director of the Biblical School of Jerusalem, has concluded his ten pages concerning the miracle of the crossing of the sea and the route of the Exodus by this acknowledgement: "We will never know where the event happened." None of the references that are quite significant regarding this point, previous to the book of this author, is found in the bibliography.

Nonetheless, the same Biblical School of Jerusalem published in 1952 a translation into French of the book of Exodus of the Bible by Father Couroyer. This commentator emphasizes exceptionally the importance of the Hebrew expression "sea of reeds" and suggests the existence of an interconnection between the Red Sea and the Bitter Lakes and two possibilities of passage between them:

...the ford of Suez, a passage crossed by the pilgrims to Mecca before the digging of the Suez Canal, and another ford that was more dangerous, near the southern extremity of the Bitter Lakes in an area where ancient trails ended up. One is inclined to locate in this zone the passage of the Israelites. (op.cit. p.15)

Thus, Father Couroyer and Father de Vaux, who were both directors of the same famous institute of biblical research, held quite opposite theses about the subject.

Renowned commentators belonging to the Sulpician Order (P.S.S.) specializing in the teaching of students in the Christian

Seminaries have also supported quite contradictory ideas concerning the same question. Some of them, excluding any hypothesis of the crossing of the Red Sea, gave their preference to a passage between Timsah Lake and the Bitter Lakes (J. Touzard, in the *Apologetic Dictionary of the Catholic Faith*, published by G. Beauchesne, Paris, 1919, p.731) or to a passage between the Bitter Lakes and the Gulf of Suez (A. Tricot and A. Robert, in their book *Biblical Initiation*, published by Desclée, Paris, 1954, p.693). To the contrary, Father H. Cazelles, a member of the same Order, made a quite different choice; in an addition, published in 1957, to the *Dictionary of the Bible* (vol. V, p.1325-1326), this commentator has supported the thesis of a passage through the northern route, close to Manzaleh Lake, along the Mediterranean Sea. The general hypothesis concerning the time and the place of the crossing of the sea that is held by Father H. Cazelles is studied in chapter 10 of the present work; the allegation positioning in time the Exodus during the reign of Ramesses II is firmly disproved.

It is of the utmost importance to have a precise notion of the zone where Moses and the Hebrews crossed the obstacle of the waters. To imagine the drowning of the pharaoh in the Red Sea, where the corpse would have been lost, would not be compatible with the fact that the mummy of the concerned king of Egypt, Merenptah, was uncovered in 1898 by Victor Loret and firmly identified later. On the contrary, a death of the pharaoh who pursued the Hebrews, which would have occurred in any of the passages through the region of the Bitter Lakes, would have made possible the retrieval of the body, as is shown in the following chapters.

The death of Pharaoh during the Exodus

Is it not astonishing that what appeared obvious in ancient times through a careful reading of the Bible became, in our century, something debated by a certain number of commentators, whereas no modern discovery could justify such a change?

Do we not read in chapter XIV of the book of Exodus that Pharaoh "...made ready his chariot and took his army with him" (verse 6), "he pursued the people of Israel" (verse 8) and...

...the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground.... The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen. (verses 21-23)

The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; *not so much as one of them remained*.... Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. (verses 28-30)

The Song of Deliverance reported in chapter XV contains other details. The Lord...

...has thrown into the sea the horse and his rider... (verse 1) he cast into the sea Pharaoh's chariots and his host... (verse 4) they went down into the depths like a stone... (verse 5) they sank as lead in the mighty waters (verse 10).

In Psalm 136, we read: "...him who divided the sea of reeds in sunder... made Israel pass through the midst of it... *overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the sea of reeds*." (verses 13-15) (This translation is in conformity with the Hebrew text.)

For centuries, these texts appeared as being perfectly clear. In comments on the Bible, the death of Pharaoh was considered an obvious fact, for instance, for the commentators of one of the most ancient editions of the Bible in French (first part of the 17th century) that I was in a position to examine when I studied the meaning of certain proper names according to the views of the time.

The official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church about the Exodus until the beginning of the 20th century did not yet contain a change, as may be deduced from certain schoolbooks that were utilized in Christian colleges. In one of them, which had belonged to my mother, there were explicit comments about what happened to the pharaoh of the Exodus. The book was entitled *An Illustrated Biblical History* (*L'Histoire Sainte Illustrée*) by Reverend H. Lesetre; it was authorized by

a decision of the Cardinal, Archbishop of Paris, on October 31, 1906, and published in 1907 by Editions P. Lethellieux, Paris. Under an illustration of the miracle of the sea, representing Pharaoh driving his chariot between two walls of water, the caption evoked the Lord “who divided in two parts the Red Sea, drove the Israelite people into its midst and overthrew Pharaoh and his host into the sea.”

Thereafter, the teachings of certain exegetes began to differ about the destiny of the pharaoh of the Exodus. In our days, priests have told me how very surprised they had been by the points of view spread by the Biblical School of Jerusalem asserting that the Exodus had occurred in the course of the reign of a king, excluding automatically the death of Pharaoh at the time of the event.

Certain authors who debate the question are right when they note that the Bible does not explicitly state that Pharaoh died during the pursuit of the Hebrews. Unfortunately, for them, it is not sufficient to have read in the Bible: “not so much as one of them remained” (Exodus 14:28) or “(the Lord) overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the sea of reeds” (Psalm 136:15) in order to arrive at another conclusion. One of these authors, Monsignor G. Ricciotti, has written (*op.cit.* p.222): “Probably [*sic*] the pharaoh personally played a part in the expedition, but the biblical text does not say that he was drowned, and it does not say that Pharaoh personally went into the midst of waters....”

Are we not invited to wonder that Pharaoh, presuming danger, would have let his host continue with their unwise pursuit? Did he remain on the heights, like in the famous movie “The Ten Commandments,” which led millions of people to imagine that, in this way, Pharaoh could have saved his own life?

Maybe, as far as the Hebrew text is concerned, a grammatical controversy was at the origin of the doubt about the destiny of Pharaoh. For, Rabbi Elie Munk (*op.cit.* p.149-150) has reported that, in addition to a commentator having understood, “None of them remained, including Pharaoh,” there was another Hebrew grammarian who had suggested, “Nobody had remained, except one, and this was Pharaoh.” But, even in the hypothesis of a single survivor, it is obvious that the Bible does not contain what could have designated Pharaoh as this unique survivor.

The commentators who deny the death of Pharaoh sometimes used surprising arguments, like this passage of the Bible: (God speaking to Pharaoh) "For this purpose, have I let you live to show my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." (Exodus 9:16) They present this sentence as being the word of God with reference to the Exodus, whereas it is related in the narration to plague number 7.

The tradition which defends the survival of Pharaoh may be sustained by queer superstitions. Rabbi Elie Munk has reported (op.cit. p.149) that for one commentator, the pharaoh of the Exodus "afterwards became King at Nineveh and, when the Prophet Jonah proclaimed his warnings, this king called people to repent, according to the teachings of the past." The same text relates another source of information asserting that the pharaoh who did not die during the Exodus, will never die.... There are other strange traditions, like what is reported by Father P. Couroyer (from the Biblical School of Jerusalem). After having emphasized that the Bible does not mention the death of Pharaoh, he has related a quite unexpected destiny, spread by a popular tradition: "Pharaoh who was drowned with his army... is dwelling in the depth of the sea, and he reigns over the 'marine men,' the seals...." (op.cit. p.73)

Besides all these legends, there is, thank God, logical reasoning which enables us to find in the biblical teachings enlightening points of major interest. So, the Bible lets us know that those who pursued the Hebrews, with Pharaoh on the chariot made ready for him, after they had gone into the midst of the waters, were discomfited when the Lord clogged their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. (Exodus 14:24-25) This means that the action of the Lord was not limited to provoking the drowning by means of the waters coming back upon the Egyptians, who, otherwise, might have moved when they saw the obvious danger following the division of the waters.

But, much more than that, the Bible said that the Lord launched violent actions, since the Egyptians were cast into the sea (Exodus 15:4) into which they went down like a stone (Exodus 15:5) and sank as lead. (Exodus 15:10) In Hebrew, the word "*yarah*," which appears in the text, means "to throw with force"; in Greek, the word "*ripto*" used by the Septuagint to describe the same action has the same meaning—the classical Greek-French dictionary by A. Bailly mentions that "*ripto*" is used for the casting of the disc (26th edition of the dictionary, p.1720). The

violence of the fall into the waters naturally brought about very severe bodily injuries.

How could Pharaoh have been in a position to find a means of protecting himself against the will of God? Is it conceivable that, in the end, God would have taken the decision to save the life of a man who had oppressed the Hebrews and against whom the calamities of the plagues had been launched? Pharaoh could not logically avoid sharing the destiny of the Egyptians under his command; he had to have perished during the Exodus.

Pharaoh Merenptah, whose remains have illumined past events

The ancient Egyptians held certain beliefs about the afterlife that led them to take every precaution to ensure the maximum preservation of the body after death. At the time of the Exodus, during the New Kingdom, mummification had attained its highest degree of perfection. The procedures implemented in the case of a pharaoh gave the best chance of succeeding in the conservation of what, in modern times, appears to be capable of affording the most data to the medical examiner.

In the instance which is concerned here, success would have required first that the body of the pharaoh be brought to the embalmer as rapidly as possible after death. Certain results of the medical investigation lead us to think that the process of mummification was carried out after a quick retrieval of the body and, very likely, not too far from the place where the death had occurred; we know that only several dozens of kilometers separated the region of the Bitter Lakes ("sea of reeds" of the Bible) from the northern capital (the city of "Pi-Ramesses" of the Bible).

All the mummies of the pharaohs had not been uncovered, and the mummified bodies that were found in our days in caches, as we have related in preceding chapters—were damaged by pillagers of tombs. Nonetheless, the remains of Merenptah, 13th son and successor of Ramesses II, have been found in a condition allowing valuable medical investigations. Their interest lies in the fact that they are—as far as we know today—the unique material "vestige" of the Exodus.

The first Egyptologist having associated the name of Merenptah to the Exodus was the German Karl-Richard Lepsius; who, after

Champollion (d. 1832), brought the most important contribution to the reading of hieroglyphics. In 1849—i.e., about half a century before the mummy was found—K.R. Lepsius held this thesis in his book published in Berlin, *Die Chronologie der Aegypter* (p.388); the reference is given by E. Drioton in the *Review of Religious History and Philosophy* (*Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse*, published by Presses Universitaires de France, 1955, p.39). This German Egyptologist was able to arrive at this deduction, having then at his disposal only the biblical text and what was known about the identity of the successor of Ramesses II. He compared the end of Chapter I and the beginning of Chapter II of the book of Exodus (building of Pi-Ramesses and birth of Moses), and verse 23 of Chapter II of the same book (the death of a king of Egypt during the exile of Moses in the land of Midian, this king who could not in all likelihood, be other than the successor of Ramesses II).

The Bible does not mention the death of another king of Egypt between the end of Moses' exile and the Exodus; logic implies that, if another king had died in the interval between the two periods, the Bible would have mentioned the event. We must remember that the biblical narration emphasizes the importance of the contacts of Moses with the preceding king and the confrontational relations of Moses with his successor. In a time when secular knowledge was still poor (in comparison with what several disciplines have brought to light in our days about the same topic), K.R. Lepsius could not suggest a hypothesis other than this one—which fortunately was right—in 1849; an attentive reading of the Bible had led a man of good sense to such a conclusion.

What do we know of the past of the mummy?

As the question was solved for Ramesses II, the mummy discovered at the end of the 19th century has been shown to have belonged to Merenptah.

Its story began when the mummified body was buried in the Necropolis of Thebes, in tomb number 35 of the Valley of the Kings, where the pharaohs of the New Kingdom had been interred. Merenptah was buried there during the last years of the 13th century.

The tomb of Merenptah, like the others, was visited by pillagers. Consequently, during the 21st dynasty, around 1,000 B.C., the priests took the mummies out of their tombs and, as far as we know, divided them in two groups, one (including Ramesses II's mummy) was

deposited in the cache of Deir El Bahari, while Merenptah's mummy was transported, among another group, to a small hiding-place inside the tomb of Amenhotep II in the same Valley of the Kings. The damage done by the pillagers to the mummies was—more or less roughly—repaired by new wrappings. For the mummy of Merenptah, the priests had the excellent idea to write the name of the pharaoh under the outermost wrappings so the mummy could be identified later, at the time of the unwrapping, though identification was impossible when the Frenchman Victor Loret discovered it in 1898 among a group of 11 mummies which were there in a recess of the tomb.

The initial impossibility of identifying the pharaoh led to a debate between archaeologists, the more so because at that time discussions had been previously raised when the *Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign*, discovered several years before, had posed the question of the date of the Exodus and the name of the king at the time. For certain authors, despite that the mummy was not yet identified, it could not have belonged to a pharaoh other than Merenptah, supposed by them to have been the pharaoh of the Exodus, as K.R. Lepsius had suggested.

What was the reason, when, only 9 years after the discovery, on July 8, 1907, the decision was taken to invite the English anthropologist Elliot Smith to unwrap the mummy? We cannot answer, but we know that the question of the pharaoh of the Exodus was being debated. In favor of the thesis implicating Merenptah in the event, the Egyptologists whose names follow gave their agreement preceding Flinders Petrie (1911). They were: de Rougé (1867), Chabas (1873), Virey (1900), and Groff (1902). The same year, Gaston Maspero, Director of the Egyptian Antiquities, reported in his "Guide for the Visitor of Cairo Museum" that, according to an ancient tradition whose origin was in Alexandria (without any other detail), the pharaoh of the Exodus would be Merenptah, "who is said to have perished in the Red Sea." Some authors, who thought that the cause of death would have been drowning in the Red Sea, were objecting that the mummified remains of somebody who had perished in such conditions could not ever have been discovered. In that time, one did not yet discuss the death of pharaoh which was quite obviously deduced from the biblical text, but the drowning was considered as hindering any retrieval of the body by the Egyptians.

Besides the principal observations made on the mummy by Elliot Smith in 1907, published in 1912 in *The Royal Mummies* (most of them related to anthropometric measurements), certain photographs taken at the time of the unwrapping will later appear as being of the utmost interest from a medical point of view, whereas the radiological findings of J.E. Harris and K.R. Weeks, having preceded our study, did not bring as many useful details as far as Merenptah is concerned. Nonetheless, their book, *X-raying the Pharaohs* (published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1973)—and in addition their X-ray series left in Cairo—brought interesting findings about other mummies.

The medical investigation of the mummy of Merenptah was carried out in 1974 and 1975 with the collaboration of Egyptian medical doctors, as in the case of Ramesses II's mummy. And, when it happened that the research of the cause of death became a major question, Professor Michel Durigon (who was then working in the Department of Professor F. Ceccaldi, Head of the Police Forensic Laboratory in Paris) came to Cairo, on my request, in order to open a special inquiry for this purpose. The results, which have been published in two books, quoted above, the first in French in 1987, the second in English in 1990, may be summarized as follows:

The mummy was damaged in an after-death fracture by multiple fragments after a bursting of the mummified tissues.

No organ could be examined, all of them having been lost. I have often been questioned about the lungs (were there signs of drowning?). The lungs had been taken out—a quite normal procedure—by the embalmers, and put in canopic jars that were never found. Very likely, their examination—even with a microscope—would not have been useful.

Besides that, the microscopic research allowed Professor Durigon a very important finding: he was able to rehydrate a tiny sample of a muscle of the mummy, and could discover anatomical details perfectly preserved by the mummification process—the conservation of the transversal striations of muscular fibrillae gave evidence of the impossibility for the body to have remained more than a short time in the water, for, otherwise, these striations would not have appeared in the microscopic examination.

Along with my two collaborators, specialists in forensic medicine, I was much impressed by the existence of three important losses of

matter in the thorax, the abdomen and the cranium; these lacunae seemed to be due to blows received during life, a feature confirmed by the X-rays.

A segment of the thorax was missing a part of the right clavicle and two first ribs were lacking in 1974, whereas the corresponding detached fragment had been photographed by E. Smith in 1907. The lesion was the result of a blow from outside.

The same explanation was given about a lacuna of the right lumbar region, seen and measured by E. Smith (approximately 10 x 15 centimeters). Unfortunately, the mummy lying on its back could not be moved and we could not see the lacuna from the outside; but we were in a position to observe it from inside using an endoscope introduced into the trunk through the thoracic lacuna, and to take a photograph of it (the endoscope is an instrument allowing viewing inside an organ, like the stomach, when it is introduced through the mouth).

There was no doubt that the lacuna of the head (approximately 37 by 23 millimeters, according to E. Smith), more exactly in the right parietal bone, was the result of a very severe blow. The anatomical features of this loss of matter, detailed in diverse medical reports, led the specialists of forensic medicine to state that its origin was traumatic, and that, in all likelihood, the fragment of bone pushed inside the cranial cavity had severely injured the underlying brain, thus provoking death very rapidly or maybe even without delay. The X-rays have shown that there was no bursting of the bone around the lacuna—as we could observe in the photographs of E. Smith; these findings imply that the loss of matter had resulted from a blow received during life. These conclusions were reported, with the documents, in April 1976, before the French Society of Forensic Medicine; no objection was made to our deductions.

The statements of the medical investigation appear in complete harmony with the teachings of the Bible which state that the bodies of the pursuing Egyptians were overthrown into the sea with violence, clearly expressed through the Hebrew and Greek terms, above quoted, of the narration. This striking accord between the biblical text and the medical investigation of the mummy of Merenptah was emphasized during the meeting of the French National Academy of Medicine of January 26, 1988, when an eminent specialist of scientific commentary on the Bible, Professor H. Baruk, stressed the major points of corroboration

between the Scripture and modern knowledge regarding the lesions of the pharaoh of the Exodus, detailed in my book. The last remark of Professor H. Baruk was as follows: "Thus the alliance between Science and Faith is achieved."

Teachings of the Old Testament and historical events

<i>Teachings of the Old Testament</i>	<i>Historical Events</i>	<i>Chronological Data</i>
Entry into Egypt of Joseph and Jacob Anachronistic mention of the "Land of Ramesses"	MERUSERRE YAKUB HER in the list of the last Hyksos kings Avaris	Around the middle of the 17th century B.C.
Birth of Moses contemporary with the building of Pi-Ramesses	Beginning of the construction of Pi-Ramesses during the reign of Sethos I	Around the beginning of the 13th century B.C.
Moses in the land of Midian (Death of the king of Egypt)	Death of Ramesses II, after a reign of 67 years Merenptah, king of Egypt	Around 1235-1224 B.C. (I)
80 years	430 years	
The descendants of Jacob-Israel are still enslaved in Egypt	<i>Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign ("Israil")</i>	
Moses speaks to Pharaoh	EXODUS	
	Death of Merenptah End of the 19th dynasty	Last quarter of the 13th century B.C.

I) The durations of certain reigns are well known, but their location in time remains only more or less accurate.

The 17th century B.C. is the century of Jacob and Joseph. The interval of 430 years between their entry into Egypt and the Exodus is in harmony with the approximate interval of time between the Hyksos Period and the last times of the reign of Merenptah.

The 13th century B.C. is the century of Moses: the 80 years of Moses' life up to when he speaks to Pharaoh are to be put in parallel with the interval between the beginning of the construction of Pi-Ramesses and the last years of Merenptah.

9. Other Hypotheses Concerning the Date of the Exodus

The occurrences of every major episode of the stay—as clearly shown on the table of correspondences on the preceding page—have been positioned in time and put parallel with historical events whose dates are known in our days. The table shows correspondences visible when we read from left to right.

Moreover, the Bible teaches us two chronological data which are not discussed by the exegetes: the total duration of the stay (430 years) and the age of Moses when he spoke to Pharaoh after his exile (80 years). This data enables us to discover a second kind of correspondence which is read from top to bottom for the periods concerned.

The awareness of the existence of these twofold correspondences leads us to think that the deductions gathered in the present work as a result of recent findings in several fields of research could not be conducive to establishing a positioning in time of the occurrences of the stay other than that shown. Such a degree of accuracy was obtained for the very reason that *all the episodes* were studied as a whole.

Consequently, previous studies which only dealt with a part of the events of the stay—like the Exodus or the entry into Egypt—without taking into account the other episodes before establishing conclusions, had every chance of being inaccurate; the multiplicity of the hypotheses finally suggested was the logical and unavoidable consequence of a method of research improperly adapted to the study of events that had occurred one after the other.

In addition, very often, the conclusions of the authors relied on an extremely limited supply of data or even a unique piece of information (supposed to be valuable, like the *Stela of Israd*) and, when it happened that the argument became unworthy (i.e., those based on the excavations in Palestine), the study lost its value.

Other errors are explained by the credit given to certain chronological data found in the Bible (outside the books of Genesis and Exodus); the authors who took them into account might have discerned the contradictions between their erroneous assertions through an attentive reading of the text, and could have doubted their value! Today, the experts think that they are not of that much estimated worth.

Erroneous conclusions deduced from mistaken historical and archaeological data

The discovery in 1895 of the *Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign* led to many discussions, and regrettable errors, when authors wrongly estimated that the line where one read "Israil" would have meant that the Hebrews were already in the Promised Land at this time. We have shown that the word in hieroglyphs means "community of the descendants of Jacob-Israel." An erroneous reading brought some to estimate that the Exodus would have occurred much before the fifth year of Merenptah's reign, a deduction which would contradict all the correspondences concerning previous episodes of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt.

Another cause of misleading interpretations affects authors who have preconceived ideas leading them to try to find in Egyptian history what might validate their concepts about the history of religions more than what, without any prejudice, allows us to corroborate Scriptural narrations with duly established facts.

Thus the events of the reign of Amenhotep IV-Akhenaten gave opportunity to draw ideological wishes closer to a facade of monotheistic revolution by suggesting that the birth of the belief in one God must be found in Egyptian inspiration. The book *The Extraordinary Venture of the King of Tell el Amarna* (op.cit.) by C. Desroches-Noblecourt dealt with aspects of such idealistic thinking.

This imaginative fabrication about Moses having been instructed in essentially Egyptian concepts has been in existence for a long time. During the 3rd century B.C., Manetho (according to Flavius Josephus) began to spread a legend presenting Moses as an Egyptian heretic priest. In his book *Moses and Monotheism*, published in 1939, Sigmund Freud held the thesis asserting that Moses had found the basis of his belief in a unique God in the religious reformation of Akhenaten. Many authors have repeated this curious historical fancy that has rewritten history in conformity with psychoanalytic concepts. In fact, the initial title of the work of S. Freud had been *Moses, a Historical Novel*, a title expressing what the aim of the author really was.

The truth concerning the reformation of Akhenaten is quite different. It was, at first, a rebellion against the power of the priests of

Amun, expressed by the changing of the name of the king, the new one meaning, "The one who is agreeable to Aten" ("Aten" is the god represented by the solar disk). In this way, the king had made his position obvious, through a "transfer of name from Amun to Aten" (Professor Nicolas Grimal, *op.cit.* p.272). N. Grimal, in his book, has summed up what, in fact, constituted the venture of the king of Amarna:

The change in itself was not at all revolutionary. It is far from being the divinely revealed religion to which such a significance is given, through a deliberate tendency of authors who assert that the roots of Christianity are there. In fact, we might find there somewhat of a background that is in common with Semitic civilizations.... Undoubtedly, it is an exaggeration to have entitled this change "Monotheism" (Assmann 1984), for no other Egyptian god was then denied. The impact upon the Egyptian people of the reformation was almost nonexistent for two reasons: first, all the members of the Court were transferred to a unique center, "Akhetaten," and apart from what was built in Karnak, the people of Egypt had no opportunity to be the witnesses of the new cult; and, second, the most significant reason, that this cult was not in harmony with the structures of Egyptian society, since the people kept on living in conformity with the traditional religious bases.

The so-called "monotheism" of Akhenaten had its end when the rebellious pharaoh died. His successor, Tutankhamun, who had also changed his name into "Tutankhaten" took his initial name again. Afterwards, Ay ruled Egypt for a short reign and, after him, the Chief of the Army, Horemheb, during a reign whose duration was more than a quarter of a century, did nothing but keep on fiercely destroying all the remnants of Akhenaten's heresy: he did it with a great obstinacy which led C. Desroches-Noblecourt to write: "He hounded it through an implacable hatred and did his best to erase the name of the pharaoh from history." (*Tutankhamun*, published by Editions Pygmalion, Paris, 1976, p.291)

To claim that Moses lived in the time of Akhenaten—who might have given him lessons of monotheism—cannot be upheld, because around half a century separated the death of the pharaoh from the birth of Moses. But those who defend the decisive Egyptian influences upon the religious concepts of Moses are sticking to their opinion by suggesting that Horemheb—known as having fought against the beliefs of Akhenaten—had given new religious insights to Moses; in fact, this supposition, positioning Moses in time earlier than may be deduced today, had a connection with a certain assumption of the date of the Exodus, situating it during the reign of Ramesses II.

As a matter of conclusion about the erroneous deductions aroused by Akhenaten's reformation, it is interesting to quote the opinion of a former Director of the Biblical School in Jerusalem, Father de Vaux (*op.cit.*):

Akhenaten was more than a visionary: he had political objectives, he wanted to liberate his power from the overwhelming supervision of the priests of Amun and unify the group of states under his rule through a religion that might be accepted everywhere. (*op.cit.* p.102)

In the ancient Orient,

...a pre-eminence could be given to a certain god; nonetheless, the worship of other divinities did not raise objections. The efforts at promoting unification made by Amenophis IV-Akhenaten, like those of Nabonid in Mesopotamia, led to failure.

For numerous commentators, the major concern was to date the Exodus, for they supposed that the awareness of this date would provide, by itself, what might enlighten other aspects of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt. Many of them had thought that archaeological research in Palestine could bring out data about the time of their settlement and consequently about the time of the Exodus.

The study of the features of certain archaeological vestiges found in Palestine showed that a radical change happened during the end of

the 13th century B.C., leading some to presume that the population was then different. As Father P. Couroyer has noted in his translation of the book of Exodus (op.cit.), the techniques of architecture were not so elaborate (for the building of fortresses for example), the quality of the ceramics was poor, there was no trace of plastic arts, no remnants of objects coming from outside the land were found. All that led him to think that the people living there were...

...poor and deprived of possibilities of trade. Practically, there is no doubt that there was a new occupation of the country by the Israelite people having achieved the conquest of the land. (op.cit. p.13)

The author draws the conclusion that the Exodus most probably occurred during the second part of Ramesses II's reign, a conclusion which seems to be somewhat hasty, since it is based upon this single argument.

Did the archaeological research concerning certain cities in Palestine, whose names are present in the narration of the conquest by the Hebrews, bring data out allowing us to date their capture? Was this the case for Jericho, since remnants of the famous battle, during the siege, could have been discovered? On this site, the results of the excavations were initially promising, when the archaeologists were in search of the famous walls which were said not to have fallen down toward the inside, but fallen down toward the outside, under the blows of the trumpets of ram's horns.

Father Vincent, J. Garstand and Miss K. Kenyon carried out very important excavations on the site of Jericho. Unfortunately, several cities had been built on the same spot and remnants of superimposed cities were uncovered: Old Bronze during the 3rd millennium, Middle Bronze circa 1900 B.C. or circa 1550 B.C. (The dates are debated, the last building dating back to the Late Bronze period when the Israelites with Joshua are supposed to have captured the town. The confusion came from the fact that all the datings are debated, the specialists emphasizing that the estimates are hindered by erosion and bad weather, and, in addition, that the dating of the Late Bronze Period is particularly controversial. Today one cannot draw the least conclusion from the excavations on the site of Jericho; this is the opinion of Father de Vaux.

The issues of September and December 1987 of the *Biblical Archaeology Review* contained two very much documented studies: "Redating the Exodus" by J.J. Bimson and D. Livingston, and "Radical Exodus Redating Fatally Flawed" by B. Halpern. They made clear many contradictions: there are authors who have found arguments in favor of the occurrence of the Exodus during the second part of the 15th century B.C., whereas others assert that the same excavations may lead one to think that the Exodus occurred during the 13th century B.C. The debate was trenchant when B. Halpern wrote that: "Bimson and Livingston have blithely turned their back on the chronological chaos their theory wreaks."

Not only the case of Jericho but the case of any episode of the stay in Egypt of the Hebrews which would be studied without referring to the other events is susceptible to create "chronological chaos" as well. For the same reasons, one cannot find arguments in the results of the excavations carried out at Hacor and Ay, two cities apparently destroyed during the 13th century B.C. One cannot find archaeological arguments concerning Palestine usefully in favor of any dating of the Exodus.

Erroneous conclusions deduced from debatable chronological assertions of the Bible

The biblical teaching concerning the duration of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt (430 years) is now considered as being as valid as the assertion about the age of Moses (80 years) when, after his exile, he spoke to Pharaoh; we know that the correspondences with historical events are obvious.

The duration of the stay mentioned in Exodus 12:40 which has not been debated, included, of course, two periods: the happy times of the administration of the country, under the direction of Joseph, very likely prolonged somewhat after him; and the period of oppression that followed.

Despite that the respective durations of the happy times and the period of enslavement are not known, there is no doubt that the latter could not have been four centuries, as certain commentators suggested through an interpretation of the words of God to Abram: "know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs

and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years." (Genesis 15:13) If this passage had to be taken literally, it would not be in accord with any of the preceding deductions and would be particularly in contradiction with the biblical teachings mentioned above. In addition, the relation of the announcement to Abram is very imprecise. Therefore, this assertion cannot be taken into account.

In their comments on the Exodus, many authors have emphasized two biblical references that we find outside the Pentateuch. Thus, the article "Exodus" of *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971, vol.VI, p.1044) quotes the teachings of I Kings (6:1) and Judges (11:26). These two passages about the Exodus and the installment in the Promised Land are the unique ones that gave precise chronological data by references to biblical events which happened a long time afterwards; by references to the building of Solomon's Temple and the time when Jephthah lived, the Exodus would have occurred 480 years before the building of the Temple, and the installment in Palestine 300 years before Jephthah. Both teachings deserve comments.

Canon E. Drioton in his article dealing with the dating of the Exodus, which appeared in 1955 in the *Review of Religious History and Philosophy* (op.cit.), has written: "The principal difficulty accepting the hypothesis of the Exodus during the reign of Merenptah lies in giving up the definite chronological teaching of the book of I Kings." The way in which the eminent Egyptologist, also as an ecclesiastic respectful of any biblical teaching, is aware of his awkward position is significant.

There are, nonetheless, renowned exegetes of the Bible who gave a clear verdict about the historical value of the two books. So, the authors of the *Ecumenical Translation of the Bible, Old Testament* (op.cit.) have written:

The chronology of the books of Kings raises problems whose solution is extremely difficult. Now it is obvious that there is not a unique chronology in the book of Kings; there are several chronological systems that overlap each other; their origins date back to the very sources of these books. (op.cit. p.618)

What may we think about the following passage? "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel... we began to build the house of the Lord." (I Kings 6:1) Since the date of the beginning of Solomon's reign may be fixed around 972 B.C., the Exodus would have therefore occurred in $(968-480) = 1448$ B.C., approximately.

The origin of the estimate "480 years" has been shown by specialists in exegesis. The authors of the above quoted translation explain it as follows:

This date is the result of a calculation that was undertaken in a late stage of the composing of the text and is referring to what is said in the Bible about the 12 priests from Aaron to Zadok, each one being in office for 40 years (because forty years is the traditional duration of this office for a generation). (op.cit. p.634)

For Father P. Couroyer (from the Biblical School of Jerusalem), the writers of the Bible used the same method of calculation for the interval between the first building of Solomon's Temple and the new building when the Israelite people came back from the Exile. This commentator considers that the chronological assertion is artificial, aiming to say, in other words, that the building of the Temple took place half-way between the episode of the journey through the wilderness (building of the Tabernacle) and the restoration of the Temple after the Exile. (op.cit. p.11)

In his book *The Hebrews* (*Les Hébreux*, published in Paris, 1968), Professor Gerard Nahon has given a general appraisal of the chronological value of the biblical teachings; he had summarized it in *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (1973, vol.9, p.531) as follows: "One may consider that the chronologies which appear in the Bible, like other ancient chronologies, did not aim at mathematical expression of time, but only at an interpretation."

May we similarly criticize what the book of Judges (11:26) states concerning the date of the settlement in the Promised Land by referring to the time of Jephthah? The authors of the *Ecumenical Translation of the Bible* have, first, noted that it is the unique book of reference for the

period between the death of Joshua and the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. But they have added:

The book of Judges does not supply the least dating; only the durations of the functions for the Judges are mentioned; nonetheless, if we add up the number of years given for every judge, we obtain a total duration which is absolutely incompatible with the other chronologies of the history of Israel. Most of the figures come from the writers, each one having his personal logic that we cannot discover and understand. (op.cit. p.455)

Thus, when we read in the book of Judges about the settlement of the descendants of Jacob in the Promised Land, "...in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aro'er and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon... three hundred years" ago (11:26), we must pay attention to what the commentators have written in a footnote: this is "a chronological indication lately introduced, from which it is difficult to deduce anything." (op.cit. p.482). This passage of the book of Judges would have indicated that the Exodus had occurred during the 14th century B.C....

The Jewish commentators have made the same remarks. In the above quoted article, Professor G. Nahon has noticed about the assertions of the book of Judges: "The chronology of the Judges has no sound basis because they did not rule all the tribes at the same time; some of them fulfilled their functions during the same periods as others."

A. and R. Neher, in their book (op.cit., vol.I, p.XIII) have written about the book of I Kings and the book of Judges:

If one adds up the durations of their functions, there is no conformity which what we know about the duration of this period.... Obvious textual contradictions are found between the chronologies of the kings of Israel contained in the Chronicles and the chronologies of the book of Kings, as in each of these books the chronologies of the kingdom of Judah and the chronologies of the kingdom

of Israel are contradictory as well. Many remarks of this kind are made by modern authors; they are mentioned in each page of the comments of the Rabbis.

When I became aware of all these opinions held by specialists in the exegesis of the books of Kings and the book of Judges, it became, of course, impossible to refer to them for any dating of the Exodus.

Could the Exodus have occurred during Ramesses II's reign?

An erroneous interpretation of the word "*Israil*"—whose unique mention in hieroglyphs exists in the *Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign*—joined to the mistakes of archaeologists about the excavations in Palestine led authors to assume that the Exodus had occurred several dozens of years before the time of the stela, therefore during Ramesses II's reign. Since the duration of the latter had been 67 years and several months, the authors selected different periods of this reign: the beginning of the reign for Father H. Cazelles, the middle of the reign for Father de Vaux, the second part of the reign for Father P. Couroyer. The selection made by each one—for quite disputable reasons—does not seem to have aroused controversies, despite what might have been objected to concerning the consequences of certain conclusions, in addition to debatable aspects in relation to the stela and the archaeological findings.

Moreover, historical events of the time have not been taken into consideration when they might have appeared as being not easily compatible with details of the biblical narration; for example, the death of a king of Egypt during the exile of Moses could have suggested by itself that the king concerned in the biblical narration was Ramesses II, like K.R. Lepsius quite logically had presumed.

No account is taken of the effects of the plagues of Egypt—even if they are considered as having been less cataclysmic than the biblical writers described. How could they have been supposed to be in harmony with what we know about the flourishing reign of Ramesses, precisely in the years suggested by the authors as being the time of the Exodus? It is a fact that, whereas the occurrence of the plagues of Egypt during the

second part of Merenptah's reign is most likely, it is quite difficult to imagine that these cataclysms, having afflicted Egypt, might have happened during the most prosperous part of Ramesses II's reign.

The most curious aspect of hypotheses of that kind is revealed when one has exposed the Egyptological facade that gives an appearance of correspondence with historical events. Such an appearance was offered to the visitors to the exhibition "Ramesses the Great," which took place in Paris in 1976: a map of the Exodus at the entrance and comments in the Catalogue of the Exhibition (op.cit.) that was "composed and written under the responsibility of C. Desroches-Noblecourt," Head-Keeper of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre Museum, Paris.

Whereas no valid argument can suggest any positioning in time of the Exodus during Ramesses II's reign, the author wrote that "the period between the 10th and the 18th years of the reign is the most likely, despite that there is no Egyptian document which alludes to it." (op.cit. p.XXVIII) In the article "Exodus" of this catalogue, many references are made to the hypothesis of Father H. Cazelles (based on the *Stela of Israel* and the excavations on the site of Jericho), and to the Egyptian religious instruction of Moses in Egypt. According to Father H. Cazelles, Moses would have received special protection from Pharaoh Horemheb, because the latter was very much concerned about the condition of Asiatics in Egypt, an argument having little weight to connect Moses to Horemheb, as a base for the reasoning which follows, without the least sound foundation.

When the instruction of Moses was achieved in Egypt, he came back among his people during the reign of Sethos I and, afterwards, he went into exile. During his exile, a new king of Egypt ascended to the throne: Ramesses II. The conflict with the pharaoh, who is intransigent toward the Hebrews, might be explained if the request of Moses had been made between the fifth year of the reign (battle of Qadech) and the 8th year (new campaign of Ramesses II), because of lack of security along the borders. Then God launched plagues upon Egypt and thereafter the Exodus occurred, an expulsion for Father Cazelles. In the last paragraph of the article, the influence of the monotheism of Akhenaten is emphasized, the author positing that Ramesses II relayed monotheism in an "indirect manner," so that, it is stated, Moses in Egypt later will be "impregnated with this new religious trend."

Thus the story of Moses in Egypt was artificially constructed (op.cit. p.XLIII to XLVI), from the time of Horemheb—his protector and teacher—until Ramesses II—a kind of professor of monotheism... although “in an indirect manner” for the author. All that in order to claim the “impregnation” of Moses with Egyptian concepts. We have stressed the reasons why such a thesis is untenable.

Could the Exodus have occurred during the 15th century B.C.?

One cannot be surprised that, several centuries before our time, such a hypothesis was put forth by authors on the basis of the teachings of the book of I Kings and the book of Judges, particularly the former (occurrence of the Exodus 480 years before the building of Solomon's Temple). But, when the same hypothesis of the occurrence of the event during the 15th century B.C. was made by several authors in our days, the bases were different; first, the data, supposed to be conclusive, of the excavations of Jericho and other places in Palestine. The ancient hypothesis, as well as several of them that are more recent, cannot be in accord with history for the reasons that follow. It is interesting to have a look at the comments contained in editions of the Bible dating back to several decades before the modern acquisitions in Egyptology, for example in the edition that appeared in 1768 with comments by Dom Augustin Calmet, Abbot of Senones (France) and Father Sicard, a Jesuit missionary in Egypt. Very likely, both commentators possessed a somewhat inaccurate notion about the date of the building of Solomon's Temple, since they positioned the Exodus in 1491 B.C. First, they had drawn their attention to the time when the Hebrews would have erected the Tabernacle during their journey in the wilderness, i.e., for these commentators in 1490 B.C., an evaluation from which they deduced the date of the Exodus. They had the merit of thinking about the consequences of such a dating, for they questioned themselves about dating the time of Joseph: by using what the tradition concerning the duration of the stay in Egypt (230 years) had taught them, they positioned the meeting of Joseph and the king of Egypt around 1714 B.C. (Preface of their translation of the book of Exodus, p.1). This evaluation is not too very far from what we know today.

In their comments on the crossing of the sea, they have written: "The king of Egypt and the whole army were drowned in the Red Sea" (p.47); this demonstrates that they were able to logically read the Bible and to deduce, at the least, that Pharaoh had lost his life. Moreover, they asked themselves the question of the width of the "sea" crossed by the Hebrews, in relation to the passage (Exodus 14:30-31); after their crossing, the Hebrews "saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore" (a question considered in the preceding chapter of the present work). And, about the city of Pi-Ramesses, they have written "Ramesses" (p.3 of their translation of Exodus)—like Champollion, half a century later, would do—but they could not draw precise conclusions, for they were not aware of the exact meaning of the name; consequently we may excuse them for having wrongly positioned the Exodus almost three centuries earlier.

In modern times, those who wrongly date the Exodus during the 15th century B.C. cannot be pardoned. For they know that, according to the Bible, the Hebrews were afflicted with heavy burdens in building cities during the Ramesside period; this consideration is incompatible with a dating of the Exodus before this period. They have closed their eyes on this fundamental biblical teaching, while only giving credit to the archaeological findings at Jericho that appeared to them as being significant.

So, Garstand supposed that the city would have been destroyed by the Hebrews in 1400 B.C., approximately during Amenhotep III's reign. This hypothesis was held by Sir Charles Marston in 1935 in his book *The Bible Said Truth*. Before him, Lefebure (1896), Father Mallon and Peet defended the same dating of the Exodus (*references in Review of Religious History and Philosophy*, article of Canon E. Drioton, op.cit. 1955, p.37).

Consequently the birth of Moses would have dated back to around 1520 B.C. Such a dating is in contradiction with what we know of the Egyptian history of this time, whose several characteristic points must be summarily recalled:

Tuthmosis II, who ruled Egypt around the first years of the 15th century B.C., got into trouble with a daughter of Tuthmosis I, Hatshepsut. She became his wife, and, when he died, she rejected from the throne the son of Tuthmosis II, who was then too young. Hatshepsut

became Regent, and thereafter “King of Egypt.” She ruled the country until around 1483 B.C. After her death, Tuthmosis III, initially rejected, ascended to the throne and ruled Egypt until about 1450 B.C. Amenhotep II succeeded him and reigned about a quarter of a century. All these kings, including Hatshepsut, were ultra-nationalistic.

The authors, having dated the Exodus during the 15th century B.C., imagined that “Pharaoh’s daughter” mentioned in the Bible was precisely this Hatshepsut, and that, when she was young, around 1520 B.C., she would have taken Moses from the banks of the Nile, nursed him and protected him during her whole reign. When, around 35 years later, Tuthmosis III fiercely erased all the traces of the hated stepmother, Moses was compelled to leave Egypt and go into exile. According to this imaginative construction, the exile of Moses would have had causes totally inherent in political events of the Egyptian history and without any connection with what the Bible relates.... The same, about the so-called conflict with Amenhotep II, an invention appropriate for a novel....

Besides these details, such a story of Moses is not compatible with known facts of Egyptian history. Thus, for the authors of *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (op.cit. vol.VI, p.1044), there is no doubt that during the rules of the above mentioned sovereigns, their power was so strong that the Israelites would never have been in a position to rebel against the almighty kings.

It is strange that the hypothesis “Exodus during Amenhotep II’s reign” could have satisfied an eminent personality like Daniel-Rops, in France, since, despite the incompatibility with the biblical narrations, the author had given his agreement to this hypothesis in his book *The People of the Bible* (*Le Peuple de la Bible*, published by Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1970); particularly that the incompatibility with what the Bible said about Pi-Ramesses, the northern capital of the Ramesside Period, of which the author was surely aware, had not caught his attention!

Is it not still stranger that, when this objection was raised, there are authors who think to have found a reply in what follows: another Pi-Ramesses, as city of Ramesses, might have existed under the reign of a king “Ramesses” who would have ruled Egypt before the 15th century B.C.? This “reply” is not easily tenable because we know that all the

kings of Egypt named "Ramesses" began to reign during the last years of the 14th century B.C.

Another reply came in 1987 from contributors to the journal *Biblical Archaeology Review* (op.cit.). John J. Bimson and David Livingston (September-October 1987 issue, p.43), used as a pretext that the site of Pi-Ramesses of the Bible had been occupied during the 15th century, according to their archaeological estimates, and concluded that the occupants were the Hebrews who, necessarily, as these authors presumed, left Egypt during this century, thence the Exodus occurring in that time.... I suppose that they were not aware of the results of the excavations carried out at this site by the German archaeologists, and that they had forgotten that the site also contained vestiges of the capital built by the Hyksos, Avaris, around the 18th century B.C. Arguments of that kind would have brought about "chronological chaos" concerning the history of the Hebrews in Egypt, if they had not been examined through critical reasoning, as B. Halpern, previously quoted, did in the same review.

Nonetheless, regarding the most peculiar hypotheses which were made about the dating of the Exodus, as far as I know, one must mention what was suggested by a French specialist in astronomical calculations, J. de Miceli. In a booklet entitled *Tuthmosis II, Pharaoh of the Exodus* (published in 1974 by Editions du Livre, Maugein, Tulle, France), this author said that there is no doubt that the Exodus had occurred on April 9, 1496 B.C.!

10. Champollion in Debt to the Bible

As soon as the history of Egypt began to be known, one did expect that the events of the stay in this country of the Hebrews would be enlightened by secular knowledge and that, in this way, one might suggest a chronology of the episodes of this stay. Moreover, such a contribution of progressive Egyptological acquisitions concerning history could lead us to detect certain errors introduced by the writers of the biblical texts and to rectify inaccurate deductions of the commentators and mistaken interpretations that were caused by the non-objective views of certain authors. Many examples have been given of realities of this kind. Our knowledge of the religious events that had occurred in this period could not have been what it is in our days, if we had not possessed, through many pieces of Egyptological data—some of them quite recent—all that might be made parallel with the teachings of the Scriptures.

Unfortunately, such a corroboration could not bring results for many centuries, for a valuable awareness of the history of ancient Egypt did not date back to the remote past. The transmission of the data of ancient times has greatly suffered from the total extinction of the knowledge of the language when, in 391 A.D., Theodosius I ordered closure of all the pagan temples of the Byzantine Empire; after this decision, the hieroglyphic language could not be understood and communicated. In addition, when, in 47 B.C., Julius Caesar sacked Alexandria in Egypt, all the books of the famous library of this city disappeared, among them historical documents like the writings of Manetho; a few quotations of the latter by other authors cannot compensate for this regrettable loss.

It was only during the 19th century that the ancient language could be reconstructed from remnants that were initially very poor. We owe to Champollion the deciphering of hieroglyphics in 1822. Many books and exhibitions have shown the importance of his work; nonetheless, the authors do not point out a fact of the utmost importance—testified to by written documents coming from Champollion himself—his debt to the biblical text when, in September 1922, he discovered the key to the hieroglyphics.

Two preliminary steps toward the discovery

It would be too long to relate even a summary of the first attempts during the previous centuries. The major step to be emphasized is when, in 1799, a stone which would become famous was uncovered at Rosetta in the Nile delta. This Rosetta Stone, which provided the first elements of deciphering, was found by a French officer of the army commanded by Bonaparte. When this army left Egypt, the Stone was handed over to the British army, but, fortunately, a copy had been made, allowing Champollion to study it, as well as Thomas Young in England.

It was a tablet of basalt, bearing parallel inscriptions of a decree of Ptolemy V (196 B.C.) in Greek, hieroglyphic and demotic characters (demotic is a simplified writing for administrative use). Despite that the hieroglyphic text was incomplete, a certain number of ideograms could be identified, like in the cartouches bearing the names of the sovereigns, through their correspondence with our letters in the Greek text:



P T O L M Y S K L E O P A T R A

Only letters had been identified, and the question was continually debated: Was old Egyptian a purely ideographic language or a phonetic language (in this case the ideograms corresponding to sounds)? When Champollion noticed that, on the Rosetta Stone, the ideograms were more numerous than the Greek letters, it was suggested that the hieroglyphic language might be ideographic and phonetic.

On the other hand, one must mention that the extraordinary capabilities of Champollion to study the dead languages allowed him to read texts in Latin, Greek, Hebrew (he had read the Hebrew Bible when he was 13), Arab, Syriac, Chaldean and Coptic. So, when he read "Ramesses" with this orthograph in the French editions of the Bible, this spelling definitively caught his attention. Whereas, in Coptic, the name was written "Ramsis," in the French editions of the Bible that were renowned as authoritative, the name was spelled "Ramesses."

In his book *Egypt under the Rule of the Pharaohs* (*L’Egypte sous les Pharaons*), which appeared in 1814, Champollion showed that the word “Ramesses” had been fixed in his mind to such an extent that he had not written the name through other transliterations. Champollion in this book (p.248 and 425) mentioned that “Pi-Ramesses” was “the Egyptian city bearing this name in the Holy Scripture,” and gave reference to the book of Exodus. In 1814, he did not yet know how to read the name of the pharaoh in hieroglyphs; nonetheless, through the Bible, he did know the exact transliteration; such a knowledge would be of the utmost importance in his reasoning, eight years later, at the time of the deciphering.

The day of the deciphering: September 14, 1822

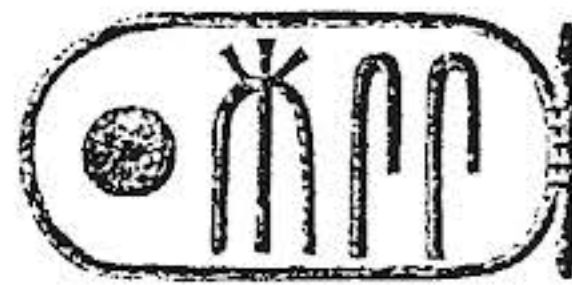
Two sources have provided the historians of this event with precise information about the elements having conducted the reasoning of Champollion, what Champollion himself has written in his *Handbook of the Hieroglyphic System of the Ancient Egyptians* (*Précis du Système Hiéroglyphique des Anciens Egyptiens*, first edition, Paris, 1924), a report read before the French Society of Egyptology in 1961 (Bulletin, Number 35, p.41), by Professor Jean Leclant.

Thus we know what happened this day in the garret of the house situated at 28 Mazarine Street, in Paris, where Champollion then lived.

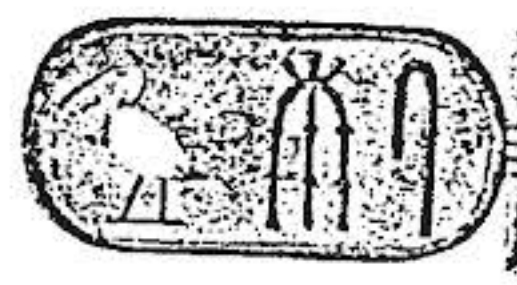
He had received from Jean-Nicolas Huyot the reproductions of inscriptions copied during his journey through Egypt in 1818-1819. Professor J. Leclant has written:

Everybody admits that the discovery made on September 14, 1822 directly proceeded from the examination by Champollion of a cartouche of Ramesses II, whose transcription was made in Abu Simbel, and other cartouches from the Tuthmoside Period, all of them provided by Jean-Nicolas Huyot. In several instances Champollion expressed his indebtedness to the latter with highly significant words.

The cartouches of the kings whom we name Ramesses and Tuthmosis are reproduced below through transliterations that are closer to the hieroglyphic ideograms than the current spelling:



RA MES SS



THUT MES S

Champollion remembered that—as the Rosetta Stone had shown—both ideograms at the extremity of the cartouche on the left and the ideogram at the extremity of the cartouche on the right were alphabetic and stood for “s.” Moreover, he presumed that the disk of the cartouche on the left might represent the sun: in Coptic “*ra*.” Then, he asked himself, Who might be a king whose name’s first syllable is “*ra*” and last one is a double “s?” Would it be possible that this king be “Ramesses,” a name read in the Bible?

Between “Ra” and “ss,” there was an ideogram (with three segments) yet unknown, which was also present in the middle of the cartouche on the right; the first syllable in this cartouche was an ibis, like “Thut,” the god Thut, the first syllable of “Tuthmosis” in Greek. In this case, could “mos” be a misrepresentation of “*mes*” which, in Coptic means “give birth to?”

After having gathered all these hypotheses, whose starting point had been the awareness of the name “Ramesses,” all the questions were illumined in the mind of Champollion. Thenceforth, both cartouches held no more secrets for him; their meanings were: Ra (the sun-god) gave birth to him, and Thut (the god figured through the ibis) gave birth to him. Champollion was in a position to deduce that hieroglyphic writing contained phonetic ideograms, like “*s*” and “*mes*”, and figurative ideograms, like “*Ra*” and “Thut.”

He was full of joy at having been able to find such a precious key in a flash, and, in a sort of trance, he rushed to his brother, who was working not far from him at the library of the Institut de France, shouting: “The affair is in my hands!” (in French: “*Je tiens l’affaire!*”). Thence,

he fell into very low spirits for several days, a condition that the doctors were not able to explain; it remains to this day unexplained.

Two years later, in his *Handbook of the Hieroglyphic System* (op.cit.), Champollion emphasized the role played by his awareness of the word "Ramesses," read in the Bible many years before; page 276 of this book contains the reproduction of the Hebrew word for "Ramesses," the author recalling that this word had designated "one of the cities of Lower Egypt built by the Hebrews during their long enslavement," and moreover, emphasizing that this name had been "written in the original text by a number of characters equivalent to the hieroglyphic phonetic characters present in the same word."

How might Champollion have been more explicit about the importance of what the Bible taught him? The answer is obvious, when one considers that, on the same page of the handbook Champollion had referred in a foot-note to what he had written eight years before the deciphering in his book *Egypt under the rule of the Pharaohs*; in this way, he emphasized that at that time he had not perceived the importance of the existence of "Ramesses" in the biblical text, only when he could read the name in its cartouche. Champollion mentioned also the other spellings of the same word, as it was written by Manetho, by Tacitus in his *Annals* and the Coptic writings.

In the eulogies delivered in praise of Champollion in modern times, for example, when the 150th anniversary of his death was celebrated before the French Society of Egyptology in 1982, I could not find any allusion to the question of his debt to the Bible; as far as I know, this aspect of the deciphering is not taught. It would be equitable not to pass over in silence one of the fundamental facts that led Champollion to claim that the "affair" of the deciphering was "in his hands."

Part Two

The Qur'an

1. Essential Facts and History of the Text

The Qur'an contains many narrations concerning the various episodes of the stay in Egypt of the Hebrews, from the history of Joseph and the settlement of Jacob and his family, until the departure from Egypt of the descendants of Jacob guided by Moses, and, with all these events, a great part of the Qur'anic text related to them is devoted to their spiritual aspects through reflections widely spread in the Book.

If one refers to the alphabetic indexes of the words which appear in the Qur'an, one notices that the name of Moses is present more than 120 times, in 33 of the 114 suras, whereas Pharaoh is mentioned 74 times in 27 suras. It seems that the suras whose revelation took place in Mecca (between 612 and 622) have been those which principally dealt with the stay in Egypt, according to a statistic that I have not verified. Authors have estimated that the number of the verses which teach events concerning Moses, his brother Aaron and Pharaoh would be about 400.

Every Muslim knows—though in the West many people are unaware of this—that in the Qur'an, unlike the Bible, the successive suras do not relate the events of the stay according to the chronology of their occurrence in the past. Consequently, a reader of the Qur'an who was not previously informed of what exactly the succession of the occurrences were would have difficulties in finding the continuity of the episodes in parallel with the sequence of the suras.

What we know of the history of the Qur'anic Revelation and the process of classification of the suras accounts for these particularities.

The communication of the Qur'an began in 609 with the revelation of five verses which, when they were transmitted around Muhammad, aroused such unbelief that three years elapsed before new revelations reached the Prophet. The Revelation, made by the Archangel Gabriel, took place over a period of ten years at Mecca. In 622, Muhammad left Mecca and went to Medina—the Hegira. The Revelation continued in Medina until 632, when the Prophet died.

In the Qur'an, every sura bears the name of the place where it was revealed as a subtitle, but the classification in the Book does not depend on the chronology of the Revelation. The suras are approximately classified according to their length, except the first one which is very short (7 verses), from the longest one (sura 2) to the shortest ones at the end of

the Book, without any relation to the various kinds of teachings; even in one sura, one may find, without any order, spiritual reflections, legislative texts or narrations of religious past events. There is an exception: sura 12, "Joseph," narrates the entry into Egypt of the son of Jacob-Israel, and after him, the entry of the whole family, the first Hebrews who dwelt in the country. In this sura, the events are narrated in chronological order; no other sura of the Qur'an deals with the first episode of the stay of the Hebrews, except several lines alluding to it in another passage of the Qur'an.

As for the other episodes of the stay, one cannot relate how the Qur'an narrates them in detail without gathering all the passages of the Book dealing with them and presenting them according to the chronology. In the present work, the following episodes will be successively related and commented on: entry into Egypt and the story of Joseph; oppression of the Hebrews; birth, youth and exile of Moses; the dialogues of Moses and Pharaoh; and the Exodus. We have presented the episodes in the same order in the preceding part dealing with the biblical narrations: such a way of proceeding makes easy the comparison between both Scriptures.

The result of the present study led me to find a great interest in such a comparison for any believer in God. For, be he Jewish, Christian or Muslim, any cultivated person knows that the religious events which occurred in this time, particularly during the life of Moses, are preliminaries to the development of each of the three monotheistic religions, this development having been immediate, delayed or distant. Very often, the points which they have in common are ignored or sometimes overshadowed. In addition, the differences between both Scriptures are full of interest, for example when one brings parallel to each other the absence in the Qur'an of certain teachings present in the Bible or the absence in the Bible of certain teachings of the Qur'an.

Until recently, one might only notice these differences, without being able to discern what was really worth emphasizing. Now, when many pieces of data of secular knowledge of various kinds have enlightened major aspects of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, the study of both Scriptures arouses entirely new prospects.

Certain thinkers are surprised by such findings, because they could not imagine that a day would come when unexpected acquisitions of

modern knowledge might lead, for example, to the discovery that medical research carried out on a mummy would reveal data to be compared with a Qur'anic teaching about the Exodus! And they are prone to pose the question: have we the right to compare the teachings of a Holy Scripture and the data of secular knowledge? Could not such a method be considered as suggesting a kind of "check" of the Scriptures?

Such a comparison—which, in my mind, could never be a "check"—refers to a small number of Qur'anic teachings that are strictly related with the history of events, and not at all with any religious problems. Moreover, while there are several incompatibilities between biblical assertions and data of secular knowledge, there is no incompatibility of this kind concerning the Qur'anic text. Certain incompatibilities concerning the Bible are related with chronological data: the Qur'an does not contain teachings of this kind. On the other hand, in other cases, there are several incompatibilities found in the Bible through corroboration with secular knowledge which appear to be corrected by the Qur'an, and these corrections are obviously in conformity with what is firmly established.

From a more general point of view, when—in the first part of the present work—I have discussed, for example, five major teachings of the Bible, related to the stay of the Hebrews, in complete accord with chronological data concerning the history of Egypt, my aim was not at all to give a special value to the Bible by doing so, for a Scripture need not elevate its standing through science. The same is true for the Qur'an, all the more so since, as far as the same events concerning the Hebrews are concerned, we cannot find in its text allusion to them and to their chronology.

In my first book, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (op.cit. 1976), where both Scriptures were examined in the light of modern knowledge, I have emphasized the same position, expressing how much I was satisfied when I found in any Scripture assertions in conformity with secular knowledge: this was my feeling about the Qur'an as it was my feeling about the Bible: for example, regarding the narration of the Exodus in the Bible, I have shown many correspondences of this kind, which are more detailed in the present work. In the chapters that follow, many examples will be given of positive facts of great interest concerning the Qur'an.

This process of thought is only the association of what is taught by the Holy Scriptures and what is taught by secular knowledge when both teachings concern the same facts. In our time, there are authors who claim that the Holy Scriptures are no more than mythical writings, fictitious stories composed by human beings for the use of people having little knowledge and lacking in critical reasoning. How could we object to this apart from the recourse to this acquaintance with duly established material facts?

There are authors who believe and sometimes teach that the study of the Scriptures of the monotheistic religions only has an interest in relation to what one may establish about the evolution, in the course of time, of the human mind, which was able to compose many legends of various kinds. What could be opposed to such theories apart from the correspondences, discovered in our days, between many teachings of these Scriptures and established facts or events that may now be positioned in history? When one is aware of certain teachings of the Qur'an—like the ones mentioned in the present work—the theory of the socio-cultural origin of the text becomes quite untenable.

Nonetheless, such a corroboration must fulfill a prerequisite condition. In the book *Reflections on the Qur'an* (*Réflexions sur le Coran*, by Mohamed Talbi and Maurice Bucaille, published by Editions Seghers, Paris, 1989), I have emphasized that only firmly and clearly established facts must be taken into account, and not at all theories that are temporary and give only indications. Anyway, in the present study, no problem of this kind came up. But, unfortunately, concerning other questions dealt with by the Qur'an, certain commentators, having juxtaposed the Scriptural teachings with their scientific knowledge, have drawn conclusions with which I can not agree, because I think that the scientific comparison lacks rigor.

There is another potential danger inherent in such a corroboration: it lies in the fact that—in my opinion—sometimes commentators of the Qur'an supposed that the text contains more than it really teaches. I have found such errors of interpretation concerning natural phenomena in my previous studies, while, at the same time, the scientific commentary seemed to me as being quite debatable. By doing so, no doubt these commentators did the interpretation of the Qur'an a disservice with Western scientists and many others; in the West, I have been in a

position to observe such regrettable results. Fortunately, as far as the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt is concerned, comments in which facts related to history or other data might have been introduced were not at the origin of many misinterpretations; I shall point out only some of them. If the commentary is sometimes difficult, there are also many difficulties when one must translate the text for those who cannot read the Qur'an in the Book; then very special qualities are required.

Professor Jacques Berque, author of *An Essay on Translation of the Qur'an* (*Un essai de traduction du Coran*, published by Editions Sindbad, Paris, 1991) has emphasized the difficulty of his enterprise, "which is still remote from what would be its ideal aims." He has written:

One cannot be waiting for a unique man to gather all the qualities that such an accomplishment would require from the one who is responsible for it. These qualities are philological capabilities of high rank, a precise awareness of the exegesis of the text, as well as of the occurrences [during the time of the Revelation] joined to a certain spiritual intuition, a critical sense of history, a special feeling for the meanings of the words, and an aptitude for introducing into the text of the translation a part of the emotions that the original text had aroused. What a tremendous number of qualities! Who might lay claim to possess them or be haughty enough to require them from another person?

In fact, the vicissitudes in the translation of all the verses are not the same: they depend on the subject, this being the most important when spiritual aspects or theological and metaphysical questions are concerned. In the narrations of the stay of the Hebrews, we find reflections evoking many spiritual aspects, but, since the main topic is here the relation of events, the linguistic difficulties are lower than for the above-mentioned aspects. Nonetheless, I have noticed the interest of taking into account the precise meaning of certain words that appear to have given a bit of clearly defined information about certain occurrences.

As a whole, the Qur'anic narrations of the episodes of the stay in Egypt have the same parallel parts as the biblical narrations; the divergences appear in the relations of the episodes with more or less

numerous differences. Very often, in the West, the existence of such a parallel may bring such surprise, when one does not know that the Qur'an is in the continuity of the previous Scriptures; thence, it is somewhat unexpected to hear that verses 84-86 of sura 6 successively quote the following names: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zechariah, John (the Baptist), Jesus, Elias, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah and Lot. Verse 84 of sura 3 says that we must believe in what God revealed to: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes (the 12 tribes of Israel) and "that was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus." The last sentence of the verse is, "We make no distinction between any of them."

Through this verse, I have understood that the Qur'an orders any Muslim to believe in the previous Scripture, despite the deep divergence about the identity of Jesus, a Prophet for the Qur'an, although miraculously born. As far as Moses and the Hebrews are concerned, there is not such a difference of opinion, and the Qur'anic narrations are close to the biblical ones (except in minor details, of course).

Thus, the Qur'an contains details which are not found in the Bible, and, in addition, certain biblical details are modified or cancelled in the Qur'an: the comparison will appear as suggestive when it is enlightened by secular knowledge for the correspondences that are brought out in this way.

What this comparison is able to suggest is not only full of interest from the point of view of the history of the Hebrews in Egypt, for it raises questions related to the fundamental nature of the Qur'an: is it a Revelation coming from God, or a text of human origin?

I regret if my question might shock anyone over any part of the two alternatives, one way or the other. For, one may presume an answer that would be a given one way or the other guided only by faith, which could not allow questioning of oneself. On the contrary, if any pre-conceived idea had been left aside, the question might come to mind when certain details of the Qur'anic teachings are juxtaposed with secular knowledge.

Not long ago, I was watching on French television Professor Jean Guitton (whose work has been quoted in the Introduction), speaking about religion and science and saying that he had the habit of reading the Holy Scriptures like any other book of ancient times. He was

recalling his first book that concerned a Lazarist priest whose reflections had led him to understand the importance of a critical reasoning about the Scriptures; in the Introduction of the present work, I have mentioned the eminent personalities who gave him their agreement half a century ago: the reflections of the author had only concerned the Bible.

It would be highly desirable that, in the West, where people are very badly informed about Islam and the Qur'an, the exact content of the Scripture would be better known, particularly when a part of this content may be compared with what the Bible says about the same topics. The narration dealing with the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt provides us with themes that can be used to good purpose for such aims.

This implies that the facts presented for reflection are not denied when those who were before unaware of them notice that they impede their theories about the Qur'an based on preconceived ideas. In 1976, in my book *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (op.cit.), I dealt with the corroboration with secular knowledge of teachings of the Qur'an about certain natural phenomena, emphasizing that the remarks made about them in the text could not be explained by the human reasoning of somebody who would have lived at the time of the Revelation. The first comment of certain authors was to refuse to recognize their existence in the Book. Later, when it happened that the publication was a great success all over the world (now, as far as I know, the book is available in 12 languages), the opponents raised another kind of criticism: whereas I had insisted that the corroboration with modern knowledge could only concern a reduced number of topics and general remarks about them, I discovered that reflections of other authors having dealt with the subject of the Qur'an and science—even when they had appeared prior to my work—were amalgamated with my personal conclusions by certain critics. So, recently, I read in a French monthly review that the Qur'an contains all scientific discoveries: past, present and future! And following such an absurd and fallacious assertion, the author had quoted my work. Unfortunately, there are in France polemicists and gossip columnists who have found in certain publications matter for making an amalgam between what is studied with seriousness and what is ridiculous.

The most deplorable aspect of such a criticism, motivated by prejudice, is when it comes from those who know well what the Qur'an

contains, since they are specialists in Qur'anic studies, and in addition teachers, like Professor Mohammed Arkoun. I refer to what he wrote in his book *Readings of the Qur'an* (*Lectures du Coran* published by Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1982), repeating the text of the introduction written for the translation of the Qur'an by Kasimirski, published by Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1970. Professor Mohammed Arkoun declared that "the language of the Qur'an has a mythical structure" and...

...despite its obvious links with the circumstances of the life of the Prophet, it keeps on being considered as a revelation. Consequently, one is obliged to consider it—in all of its positive implications—as being a human phenomenon which is abandoned to the dogmatic constructions of the theologians and to the arbitrary interpretations of the adepts of scientism.

Such concepts are taught at the Sorbonne, Paris!

The following chapters will show that modern knowledge is not utilized in an arbitrary way, but, first, in search of correspondences of the narrations with history, the process of corroboration between teachings of the Scriptures and history or other data, being the same for the Bible and for the Qur'an, concerns the same events: the existence of correspondences may be discerned in one Scripture, while they cannot be found in another. The results of the comparison are full of interest; they must be considered through what we know about the history of the Qur'anic text.

History of the Qur'anic Text

The history of the composition and transmission of the Qur'an must be emphasized, for it is totally different from what was previously related for the books of the Old Testament. Here, we do not have to refer to sources and successive revisions by diverse writers or spokesmen of communities, whose responsibility was the compilation of definitive texts written in several languages, several centuries later.

In addition to the gathering and transcription of the texts initially recited, we must take great account of the chronology. The habit of the Muslims of dating events by having the Hegira as a starting point leads them to a clear awareness of the time at which the Qur'anic Revelation occurred. In the West, very often, the date is imprecise: in the schools, the teaching of history does not give a place of importance to the advent of Islam and the transmission of the Qur'an. Later, it happened that many people located them in the Middle Ages, without having any precise idea of the time when Prophet Muhammad lived and the Qur'an was communicated. Such an imprecision may lead to quite erroneous conclusions.

I have been in a position to know from experience how inaccurate these conclusions might be in the minds of certain cultivated persons who let me know their reflections after having read my first above-quoted book: the existence of scientific errors in the Bible, appeared, of course, as being quite easily explained by the lack of scientific culture of the writers in these ancient times; as to the existence in the Qur'an of assertions concerning natural phenomena in conformity with secular knowledge, I was told that the explanation appeared, as well, for my interlocutors, since the Qur'an was supposed to have been written much more recently than the Bible, in a time when science had made much progress; the Arab physicians, in the Middle Ages, had been able to make remarkable discoveries as did scientists in other disciplines!

Undoubtedly, such an explanation was completely erroneous, for this progress had not preceded but had followed the Qur'anic Revelation. Precisely, the Qur'an prescribes a study of the natural phenomena and seeking for science, in order to discover the signs of the divine omnipotence. By promoting a new mentality, the Qur'an was at the origin of a considerable contribution to scientific culture, from the Middle East to Spain. The meaning of such prescriptions was clearly grasped by the Prophet himself, who is said to have claimed one day: "The scientists' ink is more precious than the martyrs' blood."

In fact, between ancient times, when the books of the Bible were composed, and the time of the Qur'anic Revelation, no significant scientific progress had occurred, according to what we know of the history of the sciences. Anyway, no contemporary of the Prophet Muhammad could have possessed secular knowledge which would enable him to be

at the origin of certain teachings we read in the Qur'an about the topics previously evoked, as well as about certain details of the history of the Hebrews in Egypt that will follow.

As in the case of the Bible, whose books quoted in this study had benefitted from the help of human memory transmitting traditions, the same process was initially the keeper of the parts of the Qur'an as soon as they were revealed. Nonetheless, there is an important difference on this point between both Scriptures: for the Bible, the traditions were kept, transmitted and modified over centuries, whereas for the Qur'an, the men had the obligation of transmitting the text without the least modification, and, moreover, they had to do it for only two or three dozen years. So, the memory of those who heard the Prophet reciting parts of the Qur'an could be utilized without any intermediary; it was their duty to exactly repeat what they had been taught: this is a considerable contribution to the authenticity of the text.

In his comments in *An Essay on Translation of the Qur'an* (op.cit), Professor J. Berque has emphasized the points which follow:

According to the traditional sources, parts of the Qur'an had also been recorded on materials of common use, and early on, certain parts had already been reassembled. Nonetheless, the first written copies were made of fragments and the texts might have contained some differences. The memory of those who recited these parts was considered as bringing much more safety: one knows that people in these countries gave a greater importance to the voice.... The first complete collection dates back to the caliphate of Uthman who died in 656: this was the first authorized version, made official by the Caliph, and composed according to the process of ordering the texts, as the Prophet wanted to present them.

And, Professor J. Berque relates the part played in this classification by the secretary of Muhammad; Zayd Ibn Thabit (op.cit. p.713-714).

The Muslim sources brought complements to this history.

Texts formally prove that, long before the Prophet left Mecca for Medina, the Qur'anic text so far as revealed had been written down. We

shall see how the Qur'an is authentic in this. We know that Muhammad and the believers who surrounded him were accustomed to reciting the revealed text from memory. It is therefore inconceivable for the Qur'an to refer to facts that did not square with reality, because the latter could so easily be checked with people in the Prophet's following, by asking the authors of the transcription.

Suras refer to the writing down of the Qur'an before the Prophet left Mecca in 622:

- sura 80, verses 11-16:
"By no means! Indeed it is a message of instruction. Therefore whoever wills, should remember on leaves held in honor, exalted, purified, in the hands of scribes noble and pious."
- sura 85, verses 21-22:
"Nay, this is a glorious reading on a preserved tablet."
- sura 56, verses 77-80:
"This a glorious reading in a book well kept, which none but the purified teach. This is a Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds."

The Qur'an itself provides indications as to the fact that it was set down at the time of the Prophet. It is a known fact that there were several scribes in his following, the most famous of whom, Zayd Ibn Thabit, has left his name to posterity.

In the preface to his French translation of the Qur'an (1971), Professor Hamidullah gives an excellent description of the conditions that prevailed when the text of the Qur'an was written, lasting up until the time of the Prophet's death:

The sources all agree in stating that whenever a fragment of the Qur'an was revealed, the Prophet called one of his literate companions and dictated it to him, indicating at the same time the exact position of the new fragment in the fabric of what had already been received.... Descriptions note that Muhammad asked the scribe to reread to him what had been dictated so that he could correct any deficiencies.... It is known how since the Prophet's time, Muslims acquired the habit of keeping vigil during

Ramadan, and of reciting the whole of the Qur'an in addition to the usual prayers expected of them. Several sources said that Muhammad's scribe Zayd was present at this final bringing-together of the texts. Elsewhere, numerous personalities are mentioned as well.

Extremely diverse materials were used for this first record: parchment, leather, wooden tablets, camel's scapula, soft stone for inscriptions, etc.

At the same time however, Muhammad recommended the faithful to learn the Qur'an by heart. They did this for a part if not all of the text recited during prayers. Thus there were "Hafizun" who knew the whole of the Qur'an by heart and spread it abroad. The method of doubly preserving the text both in writing and by memorization proved to be extremely precious.

Not long after the Prophet's death (632), his successor Abu Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam, asked Muhammad's former head scribe, Zayd Ibn Thabit, to make a copy; this he did. On Omar's initiative (the future second Caliph), Zayd consulted all the information he could assemble at Medina (the witness of the "Hafizun," copies of the Book written on various materials belonging to private individuals), all with the object of avoiding possible errors in transcription. Thus an extremely faithful copy of the Book was obtained.

The sources tell us that Caliph Omar, Abu Bakr's successor in 634, subsequently made a single volume (*mushaf*) that he preserved and gave on his death to his daughter Hafsa, the Prophet's widow.

The third Caliph of Islam, Uthman, who held the Caliphate from 644 to 655, entrusted a commission of experts with the preparation of the document produced under Abu Bakr which had remained in Hafsa's possession until that time. The commission consulted Muslims who knew the text by heart. The critical analysis of the authenticity of the text was carried out very rigorously. The agreement of the witnesses was deemed necessary before the slightest verse containing debatable material was retained. The result is a text containing an order of suras that reflects—so it is thought today—the order followed by the Prophet in his complete recital of the Qur'an during Ramadan, as mentioned above.

One might perhaps ponder the motives that led the first three Caliphs, especially Uthman, to commission collections and recensions of

the text. The reasons are in fact very simple: Islam's expansion in the very first decades following Muhammad's death was very rapid indeed and it happened among people whose native language was not Arabic. Absolutely essential steps had to be taken to ensure the spread of a text that retained its original purity: Uthman's recension had this as its objective.

Uthman sent copies of the recension to the centers of the Islamic Empire and that is why, according to Professor Hamidullah, copies attributed to Uthman exist in Tashkent and Istanbul. Apart from one or two possible mistakes in copying, the oldest documents known to the present day, that are to be found throughout the Islamic world, are identical; the same is true for documents preserved in Europe (there are fragments in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris which, according to the experts, date from the 8th and 9th centuries A.D.). The numerous ancient texts that are known to be in existence all agree except for very minor variations which do not change the general meaning of the text at all. If the context sometimes allows more than one interpretation, it may well have to do with the fact that ancient writing was simpler than that of the present day.

The 114 suras were arranged in decreasing order of length; there were nevertheless exceptions. The chronological sequence of the revelation was not therefore respected. In the majority of cases however, this sequence is known. A large number of descriptions are mentioned at several points in the text, sometimes giving rise to repetitions. Very frequently a passage will add details to a description that appears elsewhere in an incomplete form. This is the case for many narrations relating the history of the Hebrews in Egypt.

2. The Entry into Egypt: Joseph

In the Qur'an, there is only one mention of the entry into Egypt of the first Hebrews, i.e., after the coming of Joseph, the entry of Jacob and his family; we find this mention at the end of the history of Joseph detailed in sura 12, "Joseph." Elsewhere, the Qur'anic text briefly alludes to Joseph in four lines of sura 40 (verse 34): this is a reflection about Joseph expressed at the time of Moses which does not bring any other account concerning his story. In addition, the name of Joseph appears beside the names of other Prophets, like in sura 6, verse 84 (this passage is quoted in the preceding chapter). As a whole, about the first Hebrews in Egypt and Joseph, the Qur'anic narration does not provide us with details as numerous as those in the Bible: the teachings of the Qur'an are mainly concerning the personality of Joseph, emphasizing the spiritual aspects.

The narration of the story of Joseph (sura 12)

"When Joseph said to his father: O my father! I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon. I saw them prostrating themselves unto me." (verse 4)

This is how Joseph confided to Jacob the announcement of an exceptional destiny which led the latter to advise his young son not to tell his brothers of such a vision, for they might plot against him (verse 5), because the brothers of Joseph knew that he was the favorite among them all. They decided "to fling him into the depth of a pit, where some caravan might find him." (verse 10) So, they asked Jacob to trust them with Joseph when they went out to pasture, promising to take special care of him, since Jacob feared he would be devoured by a wolf. (verses 11-14)

Then, they led him off, placed him in the depth of a pit and said to their father that a wolf had devoured him, showing his shirt with false blood. (verses 15-18)

A caravan came and found Joseph in the pit, sold him for a low price to an Egyptian who thought that he might prove useful to him and his wife. But his destiny was different: the Lord had given him wisdom

and knowledge and taught him the interpretation of events, when he reached his prime. (verses 21-22)

The wife of his master "asked of him an evil act, bolting the doors and saying, 'Come.'" Joseph refused and, when they were racing with one another to a door, she tore his shirt from behind. The master of the house saw what had happened; his wife said that Joseph was guilty. (verses 23-25) Joseph was, at first, considered as being innocent, thanks to a witness who saw the shirt torn from behind. (verses 26-29)

After the narration of a feast to which the women of the city had been invited and could observe how Joseph was a kind of gracious angel (to such an extent that they cut their hands), the wife of the master confessed that she asked of Joseph an evil act. Nonetheless, she added: "If he does not my behest, he verily shall be imprisoned and shall be of those brought low." (verses 30-32)

Joseph preferred to be imprisoned. (verse 33) Having met in the prison two companions who let him know their dreams, he knew how to interpret them: one will be crucified while the other would pour out wine for his lord to drink. (verse 41) Joseph seized this opportunity to let them know the bounty of God and the religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (verses 37-40) He stayed in prison for some years. (verse 42)

One companion of Joseph who survived, after having been informed about the dreams of the king (the fat cows and the lean cows and the green ears of corn and others dry), remembered the capabilities of Joseph for the interpretation of visions. (verses 43-45) He came to Joseph in the prison, consulted him about the dreams of the king and informed the latter. Then the king wanted to see Joseph: he accepted after having recalled the case of the women who had cut their hands. (verse 50) After the final confession of the guilty wife (verse 51), Joseph became attached to the person of the king (verse 54), being set over the storehouses of the land. (verse 55)

The power given to Joseph led him to meet his brothers who went to Egypt to be provided with corn. He asked them to bring him a brother of theirs (verse 59), and ordered them to place their merchandise in their saddle-bags, so they would come again; the brothers of Joseph had not yet recognized him. (verse 62)

When they came again to Egypt, they had brought with them the missing brother. Then Joseph took his brother unto himself and said that he was his brother. (verse 69) In order to keep him in Egypt, Joseph used the stratagem of the drinking-cup in the saddle-bag.

During this time, Jacob, who kept on being sorrowful, became blind (verses 70-80), repeating his grief for Joseph (verse 84), asking his sons to go and ascertain the situation of Joseph and his brother (verse 87). When they were once more before Joseph, he asked: "Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother?" (verses 88-89) They then recognized Joseph who told them to return to their father, take Joseph's shirt and lay it on their father's face, and to come to Egypt with their father and family.

They did it; Jacob regained his sight when the shirt was laid on his face. His sons asked him to forgive their sins. All of them went to Egypt.

When they were before Joseph, they prostrated themselves. Joseph thanked God for all that was given to him—sovereignty, interpretation of events—asking God to let him die submissive to the Lord and to let him join the righteous. (verses 94-101)

Differences between the Qur'anic and the biblical narrations

This invocation of Joseph, related at the end of the Qur'anic narration, makes clear that he was constantly anxious to emphasize the spiritual aspects of his life. In the narration, any major circumstance of his story leads one to emphasize his filial devotion, his piety and the bounty of God. The mention of the entry of the Hebrews into Egypt is reduced to its simplest expression, while the personality of Joseph is uppermost in the Qur'anic text.

Instead of being rewarded, Joseph's virtue becomes the reason he is imprisoned for some years, a punishment totally undeserved, which Joseph endures with courage and resignation, having, above all, confidence in the almighty God. Thanks to God, the innocent victim will be saved in the end: that is often recalled in the narration. These moral and spiritual aspects appear much more soberly in the biblical narration, where the relating of the events is more detailed and where there are many other developments.

To these particularities we must add other differences between both narrations. For example, only the names of Jacob and Joseph appear in the Qur'an. The youngest son of Jacob, Benjamin, who plays a role in the story (a role given by Joseph himself) is not mentioned; nor is another brother of Joseph, Reuben, quoted in the Bible. The name of Potiphar, the master of the house where the young Joseph lived, is not mentioned either (though the awareness of his name through the Bible could not bring any important deduction). The sovereign of Egypt is named "King" in the Qur'an, whereas the Bible has named him "Pharaoh" as well: this detail will be commented on below and appears to have great significance.

The Qur'an does not contain the least account about the settlement of Jacob and his family in Egypt, whereas in the Bible the quotations of places, like Goshen and especially Ramesses (through an anachronism) have taken on great importance from a historical point of view in modern times.

The Qur'anic narration does not deal with the administration of Egypt under the direction of Joseph, whose excellent capabilities are emphasized. The end of the life of Jacob, as well as the end of the life of Joseph in Egypt, are not related. Nothing that might be useful to historians, no details about the time that elapsed, as for other events of the stay of the Hebrews, appear in the Qur'an.

Since we cannot find teachings of this kind in the Qur'anic text, as well as other data, if one had at one's disposal only what might be collected in addition in other passages of the Book, it would be impossible to position in time and in connection with the history of Egypt any of the events in the Qur'anic narration which occurred during the stay of the Hebrews in this country. It is a fact that the Qur'an, as far as the occurrences of the events are concerned, does not contain the least teaching which might guide a historian, as it does not contain the least material teaching which might guide a scientific researcher having in mind a specific subject. The Qur'an mainly emphasizes spiritual considerations.

The useful historical data are only present in the Bible. Two of them, concerning this episode of the stay of the Hebrews, are of the utmost importance as to the place of settlement of Jacob and his family. In the first part of the present work, we have noticed the importance of the quotation in the Bible of the land of Goshen (to a certain extent) and,

more especially, of the land of Ramesses (according to quite recent archaeological data), although through an anachronism; thus, joined to other data, these teachings allow us to deduce that the first Hebrews entered Egypt in the middle of the 17th century B.C. Particularly, the biblical teaching about the land of Ramesses is part and parcel of the five major teachings of this Scripture that allow us to position in time the entire stay of the Hebrews in Egypt.

Despite the impossibility of using the Qur'anic narration with this precise historical aim, the existence in the text of the Qur'an of two words—which do not seem to have drawn the attention of the commentators—will be emphasized in the last pages of this chapter. For I should like first to give a brief summary of the comments of Muslim authors and to put stress on their care in positioning in time the life of Joseph. This must be emphasized, since, not being in a position to find teachings of the Qur'an allowing clarity on this point, they have referred to certain passages of the biblical text which had especially aroused the reflections of Jewish commentators, and they have compared them with several Egyptological data.

Brief summary of comments by Muslim exegetes

The translation of the Qur'an by Sheikh Si Bubaker Hamza, former Director of the Muslim Institute, Paris (published in 1972 by Fayard-Denoel, Paris) contained numerous and long comments on the text. About sura "Joseph," he has devoted several pages (465 and sq.) to the question: "At what time did Joseph live?" This was precisely, chronologically speaking, the first question I had asked.

In his commentary he noted that, contrary to the opinion of certain Orientalists, the sura "Joseph" has never been considered as "suspicious" by the community of the Shiah: this sura is present in all the editions of the Qur'an published under their supervision and its authenticity never aroused doubts. Moreover, in Persian literature, the sura "Joseph" had inspired novels: Sheikh Hamza noted that he was aware of 17 Persian novels having borrowed themes from it, like the writings of Firdawsi and Djami. In the Arabic countries, the same theme had

inspired authors of novels. In *The Arabian Nights*, the tale "Jawdar" shows the existence of such a borrowing.

As to the location in time of the life of Joseph, Sheikh Hamza noticed that the Muslim commentators were obliged to have recourse to sources other than the Qur'anic teachings, despite that he had assumed that the Bible was "rather poor in details which might be interesting for historians" (I imagine that today this opinion, expressed in 1972, might be somewhat different). Nonetheless, he had then pointed out that "certain commentators of the Qur'an were highly influenced by the Haggadic literature," concerning the Hebrews, and he discovered in passages of the Bible and the Haggadah about the story of Joseph, allusions which relate certain customs concerning the Hyksos: this is precisely what we emphasized in the chapter on the entry into Egypt according to the Bible, although the sources were strictly limited to the biblical text compared with secular knowledge about the history of ancient Egypt.

Sheikh Hamza had personally widened his historical investigations concerning the Hebrews in Egypt, since he gave comments about the time of Moses: he had situated Moses and his preaching around 1225 B.C. Such an estimate is practically in agreement with what was supposed to be the most probable hypothesis, as it appears in the present work, on the table of correspondences between religious events and Egyptian history (end of chapter 8); most of the authors have thought that Moses spent at least a part of his life during the 13th century B.C. If one estimates—like I did—that the birth of Moses may be situated around the first years of the 13th century B.C., what may be established about the duration of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt is in harmony with the dating of the entry under the rule of the Hyksos.

Another source of Muslim comments about the sura "Joseph" is quoted by Sheikh Hamza: the results of the reports read before the Congress of the Sura "Joseph," which took place at the Mosque-University of the Ommiads, in Damascus; the documents were published in 1961 by Sheikh Abdullah al-Alami, Professor of Exegesis. Among the conclusions, Sheikh Hamza notices: Jacob was supposed to have entered Egypt in 1654 B.C. and the birth of Joseph would have occurred in 1694 B.C. It would have been better to present only an approximate chronology, but the former Director of the Paris Muslim Institute emphasizes

what follows: "There is a correspondence with the period when the Valley of the Nile and a great part of the Middle East was ruled by the Hyksos."

It is interesting to compare the results of all these comments with what could be deduced through the corroboration of the biblical teachings relating the story of Joseph and Jacob with Egyptological data, especially what we have emphasized about the titulary of a Hyksos king of the 15th dynasty: this led us to think that the presence of Jacob in Egypt might have preceded the reign of king Meruserre, since the name of Jacob had appeared in the titles of this sovereign. We know that his reign took place around the middle of the 17th century B.C. So, my personal approximation is close to the conclusions of the Congress of the Sura "Joseph," despite the fact that they are too absolute from a chronological point of view and the bases leading to conclusions were not the same.

Anyhow, the essential fact is the general agreement about an entry during the Hyksos period.

Two details unnoticed by the Muslim commentators

These details were not noticed by the translators either until a recent period.

The first one concerns the translations of the word "*baeiyr*" that appears in Sura "Joseph," verses 65 and 72: this word designates the animals bearing the burdens of corn transported by the brothers of Joseph from Egypt to Canaan. It is translated as "camel" in all the editions of the Qur'an that I know in French or in English. Comments in Arabic of these verses mention the same meaning. *An Essay on Translation of the Qur'an* by Professor J. Berque (op.cit. published in French in 1990) seems to me to be the first work which took note of the problem: in a footnote on page 253, the author states that "camel" would be "anachronistic," and he refers to the *Lisan* that had explained the real meaning of the word. There is here a problem for the following reasons.

When one is acquainted with the means of transport in ancient Egypt, and especially for all the long period before the Christian Era, it is quite clear—through bas-reliefs and written documents—that camels or dromedaries were never utilized at this time. Nonetheless, as is mentioned in the first part of the present work, in the narration of the story

of Joseph, camels are said to have been used, as this clearly appears in the Hebrew text and the Greek text of the Bible. Would it be possible that the Qur'an had expressed the same?

An accurate awareness of the time when men had been able to domesticate camels was a means of dispelling any doubt, in connection with precise linguistic considerations.

Several years ago, I seized an excellent opportunity to question a specialist on the domestication of camels and dromedaries through the ages. During a visit to an encampment of Touaregs in the Hoggar (Algerian Sahara), a renowned explorer of these countries, Henri Lhote, told me about his absolute certainty that they became beasts of burden only at the time of the Roman occupation of North Africa. Henri Lhote has written a book about the domestication of camels and dromedaries quoted in Part One of the present work.

What would be the exact meaning of "*baeiyr*" that appears in the Qur'an and is translated as "camel," like Sheikh Hamza did in his work (op.cit. p.481). Is it not strange that, referring to the beasts of burden used by the brothers of Joseph, the Qur'an used a word other than "*jamal*" that means quite usually "camel," without any doubt? "*Jamal*" appears in two suras: in the singular in sura 7, verse 40, in the plural in sura 77, verse 33, whereas all camels are designated by the word "*ibl*" in sura 6, verse 144 and sura 88, verse 17. What might be the real meaning of "*baeiyr*" in the Qur'an? I submitted this matter before Professor J. Berque. He referred to the *Lisan* whose authority cannot be debated: the initial meaning of the word was "all that is able to bear, beast of burden, beast carrying a load" and not specifically "camel." Therefore, "camel" is not the right translation.

The commentary about the word "camel" in the Scriptures has been completed in Part One of the present work, for "camel" is also mentioned in the Bible at the time of Isaac (the grandfather of Joseph). Undoubtedly, in the Bible it is an anachronism for which, very likely, a copyist of the Bible was responsible after the beginning of the Christian Era, when camels had become domesticated. On the contrary, at the time of the Qur'anic Revelation, camels were beasts of burden having the best qualities for transport in the arid countries. Nonetheless, the beasts of burden which had been used at the time of Joseph, more than

two millenniums before, were not said by the Qur'an to have been camels, as mentioned in the Bible. The Qur'an expressed the difference, a difference which was only enlightened by secular knowledge in modern times.

Another expression noticed in sura "Joseph" must be emphasized for it is in close conformity with a historical detail which only became known in modern times. I am greatly indebted to Professor J. Berque for having drawn my attention to the fact that, in sura 12, the sovereign of Egypt is exclusively designated by the word "*malik*" (meaning king): the word appears 5 times, in verses 43, 50, 54, 72 and 76. The word "Pharaoh" is exclusively reserved to the time of Moses by the Qur'an, where it appears 74 times, whereas in the Bible, "Pharaoh" appears in the narration of Joseph and, in addition much before, concerning events which had occurred at the time of Abraham (related in chapter XII of the book of Genesis).

Today, we know that the word "Pharaoh" began to designate the sovereign of Egypt only during the reign of Amenhotep IV, i.e., during the second quarter of the 14th century B.C. The use of the word before that time, as the Bible uses it, is an anachronism, for the time of Joseph dates back to the 17th century B.C. The biblical writers who composed their texts under the influences of the knowledge of their time (when the king of Egypt was usually designated as "Pharaoh") made this error, which is easily understandable when one takes into account the history of the texts.

The conditions were totally different as far as the Qur'an is concerned, as was previously developed. At the time of the Qur'anic Revelation, the only source of knowledge of religious past history was what the Bible might teach. Moreover, knowledge of the Old Egyptian language had totally vanished two centuries before and remained completely forgotten until the 19th century. Is all that not valuable enough to suggest a special reflection?

3. Oppression of the Hebrews

The Qur'an teaches us that, when Moses had his first talks with Pharaoh, his aim was to request liberty for his brethren; afterwards, when he met them, the Hebrews said: "We suffered hurt before thou camest to us and since thou hast come to us." (sura 7, verse 129) Since between the birth of Moses in Egypt and the time when he was definitely back among his brethren Moses was in exile for a certain time, this expression of their suffering does not bring a precise indication of the time when the oppression began. Nonetheless, the teachings of the Qur'an about the circumstances of the rescue of Moses, picked up along the banks of the Nile, clearly indicates that the oppression had begun before his birth.

In two passages of the Qur'an, God said to the descendants of Jacob-Israel, and Moses repeated his word: "Remember when We did deliver you from Pharaoh's folk who were afflicting you with dreadful torment, slaughtering your sons and sparing your women." (sura 7, verse 141 and sura 14, verse 6) Thus, in a few words, the Qur'an relates the cruel oppression of the Hebrews whose more detailed narration appears in the Bible, giving an account of the murder of the new-born males by order of Pharaoh.

Two verses (3 and 4) of sura 28 allude to the oppression during the time of Moses, recalling that Pharaoh had decided to kill the sons of the Hebrews while sparing their women. And when Moses is requesting the departure of his brethren from Egypt (sura 7, verse 105), Pharaoh said to the people around him: "We will slay their sons and spare their women, for We have power over them." (sura 7, verse 127)

Nonetheless, what is voiced by Pharaoh concerning the women has not been unanimously interpreted as the above "sparing of women." There are translators of the Qur'an, like R. Blachère in his French translation published by Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1966, who thought that the verse means that the women were ill-treated with physical cruelty. But the murder of the sons of the Hebrews is not debated.

We must notice that the other means of oppression described in the Bible that would not include the killing of the male adults are not mentioned in the Qur'an. From this perspective, the differences between the Qur'anic and biblical narrations are very important, since the Qur'an does not allude to the hard labor imposed upon the enslaved Hebrews

by Pharaoh, agricultural works and construction of cities for which they had to produce mortar and bricks.

The Qur'an does not give the particulars of the means used by Pharaoh in order to get rid of the new-born males, except by slaughtering them. This might be put in parallel with the same order given, according to the Bible, to the Hebrew mid-wives, but the Bible said that they did not obey. After that, since the people multiplied, Pharaoh commanded that every son born to the Hebrews be cast into the Nile, a death which Moses escaped.

The causes of the oppression of the Hebrews are not dealt with in the Qur'an, whereas the Bible explains that it was the increase of the Hebrew people which led Pharaoh to oppress them and to limit their number. As far as this precise point is concerned, there is a fundamental difference between the Qur'an and the Bible. For we read in the Qur'an that Pharaoh had attached little importance to any demographic problem about the Hebrews, since he said before Moses: "Lo! These are but a little troop!" (sura 26, verse 54) If Pharaoh had been worried about the number of the Hebrews in Egypt, he would not have said that. This detail is in contradiction with the Bible about the importance of the Hebrew people: in Part One of the present work, we have noted that the estimate of the number of Hebrews given by the Bible at the time when they left Egypt could not be credible, because of the enormity of the number that we find in the biblical narration of the Exodus. It seems to me that the commentators on the Qur'an have not made remarks about this difference between both Scriptures from this perspective, except in our days.

It is less surprising that the commentators did not draw their attention to the non-existence in the Qur'an of any allusion to the hard labor for the construction of the two cities and any quotation of proper names, unlike what we read in the Bible which mentions Pi-Ramesses, recently appearing as being quite significant, and, not having the same interest, Pithom. The quotation of Pi-Ramesses has a considerable interest. For, in Part One of the present work, we have noted the great significance of the conclusions that may be drawn from the corroboration of this biblical teaching with recently acquired data of Egyptian archaeology. This interest lies in the fact that they have allowed us—although in an indirect way—to obtain indications about the period when Moses

was born, an evaluation of major value from the point of view of religious history. As to the non-existence in the Qur'an of any allusion to the building of the cities by the enslaved Hebrews, this must be put in parallel with other cases of biblical teachings having allowed a positioning in time of several other religious events which are not mentioned in the Qur'an. To remark on such a particularity of the Qur'anic text proceeds from the concern for objectivity. From a more general point of view, in the following chapters, it will be deduced that, unlike the Bible, we do not find in the Qur'an detailed teachings leading to a precise positioning in time of the events of the stay in Egypt.

4. Birth, Youth and Exile of Moses

The Qur'an relates these three episodes of the life of Moses in sura 28 "The Story" (verses 7-28), and, in five verses, in sura "Taha," these two suras having been revealed at Mecca. In addition, as to the exile of Moses, we find a long narration in sura 18 "The Cave," so named because it relates the story of the Seven Sleepers.

Birth of Moses

"We inspired the mother of Moses, saying: Suckle him and, when thou fearest for him, then cast him into the river and fear not, nor grieve. We shall bring him back to thee and shall make him One of our Messengers." (sura 28, verse 7) Thus, God let the mother of Moses know what she will have to do when the child is born: "Throw him into the ark and throw it into the river, then the river shall throw it on the bank, and there an enemy to Me and an enemy to him shall take him." (sura 20, verse 39)

"The family of Pharaoh took him up, that he might become for them an enemy and a sorrow." (sura 28, verse 8) It was not the wife of Pharaoh herself who took Moses up along the bank of the river, as certain translations of the Qur'an had suggested. Nonetheless, the wife of Pharaoh interfered in the decision to be taken about Moses, since we read in the verse that follows: "The wife of Pharaoh said: He will be a consolation for me and for thee" (she was speaking to her husband). "Kill him not. Peradventure, he may be of use to us or we may choose him for a son. And they had not sensed (the future)." (sura 28, verse 8)

Then, a sister of Moses who had followed him, observed him from afar. (sura 28, verse 11) In order to avoid the suckling by wet nurses, she suggested: "Shall I show you a household who will rear him and take care of him?" (sura 28, verse 12) In this way, Moses was finally restored to his mother: thus, she was comforted and not grieved. (sura 28, verse 13)

As to what follows about the youth of Moses, during the subsequent years spent away from his family, the Qur'an does not contain any teaching.

The text gets back to relating the life of Moses when "he reached his full strength and was ripe, having received wisdom and knowledge from God." (sura 28, verse 14) And one day, Moses heard a call for help from one of his brethren who was battling against an Egyptian. Moses struck him with his fist and killed him. (sura 28, verse 15) He asked the Lord to forgive him. (sura 28, verse 16) Thereafter, he was fearing, vigilant, dreading investigation by the Egyptian authorities, when a man came to him and told him that the chiefs were taking counsel against him in order to sentence him to death. He advised Moses to escape; so, he left Egypt and went to the land of Midian. (sura 28, verses 20-22)

Exile of Moses

Midian, where Moses had spent the first period of his exile, is a country of the western part of the Arabic Peninsula: Moses lived there as a nomad, since the Qur'an—straightaway after the relation of his departure from Egypt—narrates the episode of Moses arriving at the well of Midian. There, he found a whole tribe of men watering and, apart from them, two women keeping back their flock, for they could not let them drink until the shepherds returned from the water. So, Moses watered them for the two women. (sura 28, verses 23-24)

Their father was an old man who wanted to hire and reward Moses, and, since one of his daughters had found Moses "strong and trustworthy," the sheikh decided to suggest to him marrying one of them, on condition that he hire himself to him for the term of eight pilgrimages (if he were to complete ten, it would be of his own accord), without making it hard for him. (sura 28, verses 25-27)

We must note that the Qur'anic text dealing with the stay of Moses in Midian only points out the duration of time spent by Moses with his father-in-law, and not at all the total duration of the exile outside Egypt.

During his exile, Moses did not permanently stay in the country of Midian. He surely moved and traveled as a nomad, outside Egypt and Midian. The Qur'an does not say what the durations of his journeys outside these countries were. For example, in the relation of his travels to a companion toward the junction of the two seas, we read in the Qur'an that Moses told him: "I will not give up until I reach the point

where the two seas meet" (sura 18, verse 60); this journey was very likely long and surely very important since the Qur'an relates it, with many ups and downs, in this sura, until verse 82.

Where may we locate the junction of "the two seas?"

There are commentators, like Yusuf Ali, who supposed that this might be the southern extremity of the Sinai Peninsula, at the junction of the Gulf of Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez. Instead of suggesting hypotheses, it is more instructive to refer to the other mentions of "the two seas" in the Qur'an: i.e., sura 25, verse 53; sura 35, verse 12; sura 55, verses 19, 20 and 22. In sura 35, verse 12, we read: "The two seas are not alike. The water of one is agreeable, sweet, pleasant to drink. The other, salty and bitter. You eat fresh meat from each one and you extract from each ornaments which you wear." The verses above quoted of suras 25 and 55 mentioned a "barrier" between them, that the waters do not transgress, a partition that is forbidden to cross, i.e., in other words, the river water does not mix with sea water at the estuary, a phenomenon which is observed at the estuary of rivers with a very large outflow: thus, the mixing of the fresh water with the salty water of the sea does not occur until far out at sea.

Where does one know such a kind of estuary in the Middle East? There is only one, the estuary of the Tigris and Euphrates that unite and form a long "sea," the Shatt Al Arab, which flows into the Arab Gulf. Very likely, Moses, as a nomad, from the land of Midian where he stayed a long time with his father-in-law, went as far as these two seas, at the other extremity of the Arabic Peninsula. Therefore, his exile could not have been short.

Anyhow, during the long journey with his companion that is related in detail in the Qur'an, Moses had a life full of adventures and meetings, whose narrations cannot be summarized here. What, in the Qur'an, concerns this part of the life of Moses, contains reflections of high spiritual significance about the features of human judgments, that are often much too hasty and do not discern deep realities. So, the absence of human wisdom and the injustices appear as being in contrast with what is decided by God.

The comparison between Qur'anic and biblical narrations leads us to mention a significant difference, since there is in the Bible a teaching that has taken on great importance in the light of Egyptological data,

i.e., the death of the king of Egypt, when Moses was in exile—and that does not exist in the Qur'an.

Of course, the Qur'an is not a book of history, and one could not expect that it would have to teach us a detail of the history of Egypt in a narration of religious events. If I emphasize this fact, the reason is that it is in connection with other similar particularities of the Bible, particularities that allowed not only the general positioning in history of the stay of the Hebrews, but the clear positioning of Moses in time.

We must refer to what was established: most likely, Moses, before the Exodus, lived during the rules of two Pharaohs, if not three of them: Sethos I, Ramesses II and Merenptah—we notice a certain uncertainty because Sethos I shared power with Prince Ramesses, who became his successor. Anyhow, the data that have been collected about this first part of his life show that Moses was born, with no doubt, around the first years of the 13th century B.C. In this time, we may situate the beginning of the long reign of Ramesses II, whose duration was a bit more than 67 years. Surely, the biblical teaching seems to be of the utmost interest; nonetheless, we could not imagine who other than Ramesses II might have been the king of Egypt who died during the exile of Moses; thus, Moses is accurately positioned in time.

This must be emphasized, since there are many commentators who, unfortunately, used what they erroneously thought to be accurate Egyptological data and presumed that Moses lived during the 15th century B.C. Such a hypothesis was obviously in contradiction with the history of Egypt. For one cannot conceive that during this ultra-nationalistic period, Moses and the Hebrews might have behaved so abruptly before the authorities of the country; historians of Egypt have remarked on it; what the Qur'an teaches us of the period when Moses, after his exile, spoke to Pharaoh and requested liberty on behalf of his brethren, would have been highly unlikely.

The burning bush—the mission of Moses

The event of the burning bush took place when Moses was traveling as a nomad with his family, very likely in the Sinai Peninsula. After having seen a fire, he was called by God by his name; God let him know

his mission, while granting him supernatural powers: this is summarily what happened in a place named by the Qur'an "the holy valley of Tuwa." (sura 20, verse 12)

The narrations are found in three suras: sura 20, verses 9-23; sura 27, verses 7-14; sura 28, verses 29-35; each one relates what occurred in quite similar terms. Moses saw a fire on a side of the mountain, Mount Sinai according to the exegetes. At first, he thought that it was a natural phenomenon, since he said to his family: "I see a fire afar off. Peradventure I may bring you a brand therefrom." (sura 20, verse 10) He understood what was happening to him when he heard that he was being called by name when God said: "I, even I, am thy Lord." (sura 20, verses 11 and 12)

Before the announcement of his mission whose aim was to request the liberation of his brethren, God showed to Moses the supernatural signs that would be granted to him for this purpose: the staff which was in his right hand, after being cast down, became a serpent, gliding; in addition, when Moses thrust his hand within his armpit, it came forth white without hurt. (sura 20, verses 17-22) Then God said to Moses: "Then, these shall be two proofs from your Lord unto Pharaoh and his chiefs." (sura 28, verse 32)

Moses, presuming the difficulty of his mission when back among the Egyptians, said to God that he had killed a man among them and was fearing that, in their turn, they would kill him. (sura 28, verse 33) For this reason, Moses solicited from God that Aaron, who was more eloquent than him, would be associated to him as a helper. (sura 28, verse 34) God decided to strengthen his arm with his brother and promised: "Ye twain and those who follow you will be the winners." (sura 28, verse 35) Many suras recall the mission of Moses, each one in several lines: sura 10, verses 87-89; sura 19, verses 51-53; sura 20, verses 24-36 and 42-48; sura 23, verses 45-50; sura 25, verses 35-36; sura 26, verses 10-15; sura 40, verses 23-25; and sura 51, verses 38-40.

Nobody can doubt that Moses was sent by God, at first to the children of Israel. But, in addition, Moses was assigned a mission concerning Pharaoh himself, in order to try to convert him to remembering his duties towards God, while requesting liberation of his brethren. So, during his talks with Pharaoh, Moses keeps on repeating before Pharaoh his personal belief in a God-Creator "who gave to everything

its nature, then guided it aright." (sura 20, verse 50) Nonetheless, the ultimate aim of Moses is what he expressed as follows: O Pharaoh! I am a messenger from the Lord of the Worlds, approved upon condition that I speak concerning God nothing but the truth. I come unto you (lords of Egypt) with a clear proof coming from your Lord. So, let the Children of Israel go with me. (sura 7, verses 104 and 105)

Moses had difficulty being heard by his brethren. Finally, the Hebrews followed him, allowing him to drive them toward the liberty of the day of the Exodus. Nonetheless, at the beginning, some of them were hesitating, as the Qur'an says: "None trusted Moses, save some scions of this people; they were fearing Pharaoh and their chiefs, that they would persecute them." (sura 10, verse 83)

5. Moses and Pharaoh

Dialogues between Moses and Pharaoh

In addition to the above quoted references of the Qur'an concerning the mission of Moses, we find in the Book many passages—one of them being very long—relating the dialogues between Moses and Pharaoh. Momentarily the opposition between Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh will be left aside, in order to draw the attention at first to the exchange of quarrelsome words between the two protagonists; they appear in four suras: 17, 26, 40 and 43, where the narrations of the confrontation are more detailed than in the Bible.

Verses 15-31 of sura 26 relate a dialogue that is supposed to have been the initial one after the return from exile of Moses. Then, he had at first expressed to God, with a humble tone, his fear of being less eloquent than Aaron, and moreover, he was afraid that the Egyptians might kill him, because they had a crime against him. But God answered him: "Nay, verily. So go, ye twain, with Our tokens. We shall be with you hearing." (sura 26, verse 15) And God ordered them to say to Pharaoh: "Let the Children of Israel go with us." (verse 17)

Pharaoh seemed to have been surprised, since he answered Moses: "Did we not rear thee among us as a child? Thou didst dwell many years of thy life among us." (verse 18) And, alluding to the murdering of the Egyptian in the past, Pharaoh said to him: "Thou didst that thy deed which thou didst." (verse 19) Then Moses was obliged to confess: "I did it then, when I was of those who are astray; then I fled from you when I feared you." (verses 20-21)

Moses and Pharaoh went back and forth without any result to such an extent that Pharaoh called Moses an "insane man" who would have been sent (verse 27); then Moses had to suggest showing a sign (verse 30), and Pharaoh challenged Moses to do it. (verse 31) Thereafter, as we will relate, Moses, with his staff, would have to compete with the magicians.

The Qur'an contains many details concerning these dialogues for which it is not easy to find particular interconnections. We have noticed what follows.

In sura 17, verse 101, Pharaoh accuses Moses of being "bewitched." Moses replies that Pharaoh will be lost (verse 102), and this passage emphasizes that Pharaoh, frightened, then wanted to send the Hebrews away from the country. (verse 103) But the brethren of Moses seemed to have received from God, through Moses, the order to remain in Egypt, at present at least, for we read in sura 17, verse 104: "Thereafter, We said unto the Children of Israel: dwell in the land." Nonetheless, for several commentators the meaning has been differently interpreted: they think that this order of remaining in Egypt would be in contradiction with the biblical teaching; this is the opinion of Professor J. Berque who noted that "the exegetes seem not to have been worried about this difficulty."

Another passage of the Qur'an (sura 43, verses 46-53) has drawn the attention of several commentators to the details brought out about the psychology of Pharaoh and his counselors. Professor J. Berque in his work (*op.cit.*, p.531) has pointed out the interest of these verses from this perspective.

The longest narration of the dialogues between Moses and Pharaoh is found in sura 40, verses 26-45, with a new impending danger for Moses—for, Pharaoh at once had the intent to kill Moses, since he said to the people around him: "Suffer me to kill Moses and let him cry unto his Lord. I fear that he will alter our religion or that he will cause confusion in the land." (verse 26) The danger in the mind of Pharaoh concerning his religion is illustrated in this passage of the Qur'an by the narration that follows: A believing man who had hidden his faith came to Pharaoh and had a talk with him. This man was preaching the way of right conduct, evoking the punishment in the after-life of bad deeds and the reward for the righteous; all his reflections show a high spirituality in contrast with the materialism of Pharaoh. Then, Pharaoh, furious and mocking, turned to an important person next to him and said: "O Haman! Build for me a tower that haply I may reach the roads... the roads of the heavens, and may look upon the God of Moses, though verily I think him a liar...." (sura 40, verses 36-37)

Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh

Four passages of the Book relate the confrontation of Moses with the magicians of Pharaoh, who thought that the magicians would be the winners: sura 10, verses 77-82; sura 7, verses 109-126; sura 26, verses 32-51; sura 20, verses 56-76. Each passage begins with recalling the fear of Pharaoh and his magicians of seeing Moses and Aaron dominating the country (sura 10, verse 78) or provoking the expelling from Egypt of the rulers of the country: sura 7, verse 110; sura 20, verse 63; sura 26, verse 35.

Then Pharaoh ordered gathering the most expert magicians of the land, and it was agreed that they would meet Moses and enter into rivalry with him and Aaron. The magicians were pretending to give Moses an advantage by offering to begin the competition. Moses, taking the result as certain, thanks to the help of God, suggested the same thing, so the magicians were the first ones to throw down their cords and their staves. (sura 26, verse 44) But Moses threw down his staff which "swallowed that which they did." (verse 45) This passage describes what we, today, might call a conjuring trick.

Nonetheless, Moses, during another encounter with the magicians felt afraid, and God intervened, in order to comfort him. We read in the Qur'an:

(Moses) said (to the magicians): Throw! Then lo! their cords and their staves, by their magic, appeared to him as though they ran. And Moses conceived a fear in his mind. We said: Fear not! Thou art the higher. Throw that which is in thy right hand. It will eat up that which they have made. Lo! that which they have made is but a wizard's artifice, and a wizard shall not be successful beyond whatever point (of skill) he may attain. Then the wizards were all flung down prostate, crying: We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses. (sura 20, verses 66-70)

In sura 26, the confrontation between Moses and the magicians had a similar end. We read:

Then they threw down their cords and their staves and said: By Pharaoh's might, we verily are the winners. Then Moses threw his staff and it swallowed that which they did falsely show. And the wizards were flung prostrate, crying: We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron. (sura 26, verses 44-48)

The submission of the magicians, struck by the astounding powers of Moses and Aaron, triggered the anger of Pharaoh; then, he threatened to hang them from the trunks of palm-trees. (sura 20, verse 71; sura 7, verse 124; sura 26, verse 49)

These passages must be compared to the biblical narration which clearly says that the staves of the magicians became genuine serpents. Would it be conceivable that the magicians of Pharaoh had the same power as Moses and Aaron to provoke the apparition of animals?

On the contrary, the Qur'an presents the magicians as having the capabilities of conjurers whose tricks are, of course, impressive, but remained mere tricks. Verse 66 of sura 20 obviously expresses that it was really an appearance through the word "*yukhayyalu*" whose precise meaning is "it gives the impression of...": most of the time, translations of the Qur'an have emphasized the outward impression as contrasted with the inner reality.

This is a difference between the Qur'an and the Bible about the authentic capabilities of the magicians of Pharaoh. But what Moses and Aaron could show of their supernatural powers to Pharaoh was not demonstrative enough to convince him. This is why God added to the previously mentioned almighty signs cataclysms which would afflict Pharaoh and the whole country.

The cataclysms which afflicted Egypt

In contrast with the long biblical narration of 10 plagues, the Qur'an contains only a mention through five words: "So, We sent them the flood, the locusts, the vermin, the frogs and the blood." (sura 7, verse 133) But no detail appears in the Book about these five cataclysms.

Only the four last plagues mentioned in the Qur'an are related in the Bible. The change of the waters into blood and the proliferation of frogs are presented in the Bible as having been not only provoked by Moses and Aaron, thanks to their all-powerful staff, but also by the magicians of Pharaoh: this is another particularity of the biblical narrations which attributes to the magicians supernatural powers, here concerning the multiplication that suddenly occurred of animals.

The flood, mentioned as the first one of the five cataclysms in the Qur'an, is an exaggeration of a natural phenomenon, the yearly Nile flood. The blood may be explained as it was suggested in the first part of the present work: the inundation of the Nile bringing waters colored by the sediments coming down from Upper Egypt. Locusts, vermin and frogs are also natural phenomena which had then occurred with special intensity.

In fact, the distresses that had afflicted Egypt, according to the Qur'an, cannot be limited to these five so-called plagues. Before the mention of the latter in the Qur'an, we read in the Book—in the same passage of sura 7—that the country had been severely afflicted by other calamities: "We straitened Pharaoh's folk with famine and the dearth of fruits, peradventure they might heed." (sura 7, verse 30) But they did take heed of what had happened to them and "whenever good befell them, they said: this is ours; and whenever evil smote them, they ascribed it to the evil auspices of Moses and those with him." (sura 7, verse 131) And they finally said: "Whatever portent thou bringest wherewith to bewitch us, we shall not put faith in thee." (sura 7, verse 132)

The narration of the Qur'an teaches us that these calamities had momentarily led Pharaoh to accept the liberation of the Hebrews, but he broke his promise. We read in the Qur'an that the Egyptians said to Moses:

If thou removest the terror from us, we verily will trust thee and will let the Children of Israel go with thee. But when We did remove from them the terror for a term which they must reach, they broke their covenant. Therefore, We took retribution from them and We drowned them in the sea. (sura 7, verses 134-136)

The circle of intimates close to Pharaoh

In addition to his counsel and his magicians, the Qur'an mentions three persons who were close to Pharaoh: his wife, Korah and a certain Haman.

The wife of Pharaoh is quoted in two passages of the Qur'an. She is the woman who took up Moses left in a basket along the bank of the river, and advised not killing him. (sura 28, verses 8-9) In sura 66, the Qur'an cites as an example for those who believe, "the wife of Pharaoh" who had broken with the religion of the sovereign, since she called upon God for help, saying: "Build for me a home with Thee in the Garden, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his works, and deliver me from evil-doing folk" (sura 66, verse 11): no doubt she then lived in the faith of Moses. What is the reason why she saved Moses from drowning in the Nile: self-interest or charity? Did God reward her, by His blessing, allowing her conversion? The question is also whether the latter—the wife mentioned in sura 66—is the same one who had saved Moses, mentioned in sura 28?

For what we know of the position in history of the life of Moses has shown us that the king who reigned at the time of his birth was not the sovereign of Egypt at the time when Moses and Pharaoh were confronting each other before the Exodus. The same is true for the so-called wife of Pharaoh.

Korah is mentioned three times in the Qur'an as an intimate, like Haman. Both of them were opponents to Moses and called him "a lying sorcerer." (sura 40, verse 27) Having behaved boastfully on earth, like Pharaoh, they were not victorious against Moses. (sura 29, verse 39) The story of Korah is related in sura 28, verses 76-82. Korah was not an Egyptian. He was a rich Hebrew—that is, an exception among his enslaved brethren—carrying things to extremes, delighting to appear before his people with decorative clothes. Finally the earth swallowed him. (sura 28, verse 81) The mention in the Qur'an of a palace where he dwelt implies that he lived in Egypt before the Exodus. The story of Korah in the Bible is different: it is related in narrations concerning Moses that appear in the book of Numbers (chapter XVI), where Korah is presented as having been the head of a revolt of 250 people against Moses and

Aaron after the departure from Egypt. This relative of Moses finally perished as written in the Qur'an.

This Haman does not appear in the Bible, while he is mentioned six times in the Qur'an: sura 28, verses 6, 8 and 38; sura 29, verse 39; and sura 40, verses 24 and 36. He was very close to Pharaoh who, boastful and mocking, said: "O Haman, build for me a tower that haply I may reach the roads... of the heavens and may look upon the God of Moses, though verily I think him a liar." (sura 40, verses 36-37) Undoubtedly, Haman was a master of constructions.

We will show that the name, as it is written in Arabic in the Qur'an, is the exact transliteration of the name of a person whose hieroglyphic orthograph is perfectly known today. As far as I know, no commentator of the Qur'an has dealt with this question on a thorough hieroglyphic basis. One has been searching for consonances with the name of the Egyptian god "Amun," which would have been badly transliterated in the Arabic language. Other authors have suggested that through "Haman" there might have been an allusion to Aman, a counselor of Assuerus (biblical name of Xerxes) who was an enemy of the Jews: such a comparison does not take account of the historical chronology. The only valid investigation was to ask an expert in Old Egyptian for his opinion about the presence in the Qur'an of this name.

In the book *Reflections on the Qur'an* (*Réflexions sur le Coran*, op.cit. 1989), I have related the result of such a consultation that dates back to a dozen years ago and led me to question a specialist who, in addition, knew well the classical Arabic language. One of the most prominent French Egyptologists, fulfilling these conditions, was kind enough to answer the question. I showed him the word "Haman" that I had copied exactly like it is written in the Qur'an, and told him that it had been extracted from a sentence of a document dating back to the 7th century A.D., the sentence being related to somebody connected with Egyptian history. He said to me that, in such a case, he would see in this word the transliteration of a hieroglyphic name but, for him, undoubtedly it could not be possible that a written document of the 7th century had contained a hieroglyphic name—unknown until that time—since, in that time, the hieroglyphs had been totally forgotten. In order to confirm his deduction about the name, he advised me to consult the *Dictionary of*

Personal Names of the New Kingdom by Ranke, where I might find the name written in hieroglyphs, as he had written before me, and the transliteration in German. I discovered all that had been presumed by the expert, and, moreover, I was stupefied to read the profession of Haman: "Chief of the workers in stone-quarries," exactly what could be deduced from the Qur'an, though the words of Pharaoh suggest a master of construction. When I came again to the expert with a photocopy of the page of the *Dictionary* concerning "Haman" and I showed him one of the pages of the Qur'an where he could read the name, he was speechless....

Moreover, Ranke had noted, as a reference, a book published in 1906 by the Egyptologist Walter Wreszinski: the latter had mentioned that the name of "Haman" had been engraved on a stela kept at the Hof-Museum of Vienna (Austria). Several years later, when I was able to read the profession written in hieroglyphs on the stela, I observed that the determinative joined to the name had emphasized the importance of this intimate of Pharaoh.

Had the Bible or any other literary work, composed during a period when the hieroglyphs could still be deciphered, quoted "Haman," the presence in the Qur'an of this word might have not drawn special attention. But, it is a fact that the hieroglyphs had been totally forgotten at the time of the Qur'anic Revelation and that one could not read them until the 19th century A.D. Since matters stood like that in ancient times, the existence of the word "Haman" in the Qur'an suggests a special reflection.

Who was the pharaoh concerned at that time?

Nothing in the text of the Qur'an can lead us to a deduction: the king of Egypt is called Pharaoh when Moses was born and, a long time afterwards, at the time of the Exodus, he is still designated by the same name. The same is true for the Bible; nonetheless, there is a difference lying in the fact that the latter says that, during the exile of Moses, the king of Egypt died, implying the existence of a new reign. In this way, the Bible points out that Moses, before the Exodus, lived under the reigns of two pharaohs, at least.

The Qur'anic text teaches us something more than the Bible, through the mention of the name "Haman." But the Egyptological data quoted above only show that this is a personal name of the New Kingdom; this secular knowledge is not precise enough to answer the question.

The references that are useful for this purpose are deduced from Egyptian history and archaeology, in addition to the medical data resulting from the investigations of the mummies of pharaohs who then ruled Egypt. Today, it seems that there is not another tenable thesis than that which positions the birth of Moses around the beginning of the 13th century B.C. and the Exodus during the last quarter of the same century, Ramesses II being the pharaoh who ruled Egypt during the first years of the life of Moses and died during the exile of the latter. Merenptah is the pharaoh with whom Moses is confronted after his exile and who will die during the Exodus.

It is of the utmost interest to know this historical context for the following reasons:

The *Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign*, which became famous because it contains the mention of the word "*Israil*" as a unique hieroglyphic, has shown that this king had laid waste to the collectivity of the Hebrews through oppression. But, unfortunately, an erroneous interpretation of the word "*Israil*" aroused a great confusion. In fact, "*Israil*" had designated the collectivity of the children of Israel, illustrated on the stela by ideograms representing men and women sitting down (see chapter 6 of Part One). The stela may be dated circa 1230-1219 B.C.: during this period of Merenptah's reign they were still in Egypt.

The stela emphasizes that the collectivity of Israel no more has its "seed," very likely its seed of posterity, as has been suggested. Rightly, it may be presumed that this expression is in connection with the genocide of the newborn males decided on by Pharaoh before the reign of Merenptah, a genocide which Moses escaped. If this is the correct interpretation to be given to the hieroglyphic text of the stela, we must put it in parallel with what the Qur'an teaches us about the "*banu Israil*," the children of Israel, oppressed by the Egyptians, since we read in the Book that they afflicted them with dreadful torment, slaughtering the sons and sparing the women. (sura 7, verse 141 and sura 14, verse 6)

6. The Exodus

The final episode of the stay of the Hebrews, their departure from Egypt, was—in Islam as in the Judeo-Christian World—at the origin of strange interpretation and folkloric tales that we owe to an innate liking of man for imaginative constructions. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to know the exact Scriptural teachings. The Qur'anic narrations of the Exodus are shorter than the biblical ones; nonetheless, they deal with the major details of the event that are found in the Bible: the announcement by God to Moses, in a few words, of what will be, the separation of the waters provoked by the staff of Moses, the pursuit of Pharaoh and his host who are “thrown away” into the sea. In addition, the Qur'an emphasizes two points which, in the Bible, are either only implied, according to the context, or not mentioned at all, i.e., the death of Pharaoh and the destiny of his drowned body.

The narration

God had announced to Moses the miraculous crossing of the sea, saying: “By night, take away those who were my servants. Strike for them a dry path in the sea, fearing not to be overtaken, neither being afraid.” (sura 20, verse 77) In the same sura we read that God had announced, in addition: “You will be followed. Leave the sea parted. They will become a drowned army...” (sura 44, verses 23-24)

The Qur'an does not contain what the Bible says about the place in the delta that the Hebrews left and the route they initially took in Egypt (avoiding the northern route), in order to cross a “sea” that is called in the Bible “the sea of reeds.”

Certain authors have thought that verse 60 of sura 26 indicates that the army of Pharaoh had pursued the fleeing Hebrews towards the east. Such an interpretation is given by Professor J. Berque and by R. Blachère in his translation (published by Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1966, p.396), while many Muslim commentators give another meaning to this verse. The question of the itinerary followed by the Hebrews who fled and the Egyptians who pursued them has been examined in Part One of the present work.

Anyhow, when they arrived at the obstacle of the sea, the Hebrews, seeing the Egyptians behind them, were at first afraid and said to Moses: "We are indeed caught up." (sura 26, verse 61) Moses reassured them, saying: "My Lord is with me. He will guide me." (verse 62) Then, Moses parted the sea with his staff. (verse 63) Pharaoh and the Egyptians who pursued the Hebrews were "seized and thrown away into the sea" (sura 28, verse 40) and became "a drowned host" (sura 44, verse 24).

Most of the translators have the habit of limiting their interpretation to the existence of a drowning and they do not emphasize that the Qur'an teaches us that they were "seized" and "thrown away into the sea," a detail which points out a violent action which is to be put in parallel with a biblical teaching, particularly stressed in Part One.

According to the Qur'anic narrations, there is no doubt about the death of Pharaoh during the Exodus. Moreover, the Qur'an says that Pharaoh and his host will be damned: "...the Day of Resurrection, they will not be helped... They will be among the hateful." (sura 28, verses 41-42) Pharaoh "will go before his people on the Day of Resurrection and will lead them to the fire for a watering-place." (sura 11, verse 98) The Qur'an compares them with a flock that is driven to a watering-place, a despicable comparison.

Nonetheless, when Pharaoh thought that his death was imminent, he apparently expressed repentance, called to God and appealed for clemency, saying: "I believe then in no God except the God in whom the Children of Israel believe. I am of those who submit themselves to Him." And God said:

What? Now! Thou hast rebelled and caused depravity:
This day We save thee in thy body so that thou mayest
be a sign for those who come after thee. But verily, many
among mankind are heedless of Our signs. (sura 10,
verses 90-92)

God only replies, through the announcement of the rescue of the body of Pharaoh, to the semblance of the submission assumed by the latter. This last verse has suggested to certain mystics a quite different interpretation: they held that God had forgiven the guilty Pharaoh for

his faults. Professor J. Berque, in *An Essay on Translation of the Qur'an* has emphasized that such an interpretation is erroneous. He has written:

Ibn Arahi maintained this opinion against all the commentators who confirm the views of the tradition: for him, the repentance of Pharaoh just before his death provided the saving of his soul. In his 'Mawaqif' the Emir Abd El Kader stated his agreement with this strange opinion which is criticized by most commentators. (op.cit. p.227)

How numerous were the Hebrews fleeing Egypt?

The Qur'an does not contain any teaching about the Hebrew population at the time of the Exodus, nor at the time they entered the country. The Bible (Exodus 12:37) estimates that, when they left Egypt, there were 600,000 men, with women and children in addition. Consequently, in this case, the entire population would have approximately amounted to two and a half million or more, according to certain Jewish commentators. Such a hypothesis is quite untenable. But certain others, as far as the number of men is concerned, have suggested that, in the expression "six hundred thousand," the Hebrew word translated "thousand" might also mean "group" or "family": in this case, six hundred "groups" or "families" might appear to be more likely.

Anyhow, we must note that the Qur'an seems to have suggested that the Hebrew population during the time of Moses would have amounted to a much more moderate numeral, through a reflection of Pharaoh. We know that the Bible teaches the reason Pharaoh ordered the oppression of the Hebrews: he was afraid of the increasing of their population and its consequences, thence the genocide of the new-born males. On the contrary, the Qur'an teaches us that Pharaoh was not worried at all about a demographic problem concerning them, since he boastfully said: "These indeed are but a little troop; they are offenders against us but we are a ready host." (sura 26, verses 54-56)

In Part One of the present work, I emphasized that, according to what we may today know—even approximately—of the entire Egyptian

population in those ancient times, and according to all the secular knowledge about the places of the Nile River delta where the Hebrews dwelt and the region where they crossed the sea, everything leads us to think that the community of the children of Israel was much more limited in number than what the Bible suggests. How might we imagine that a crowd as large as the one hinted at in the Bible could have taken to the road at the same time, covered several dozens of kilometers at the very most and found, at the far end, a way through which so many persons could rush, without the pursuers (who were riding horses or chariots) catching up with them? Maybe the expression of the boasting pharaoh, "little troop," so labelling the Hebrews, quoted by the Qur'an is exaggerated, for it might have been below reality, whereas the biblical estimate is surely much more above it.

What action caused the death of the pursuers?

The drowning of Pharaoh and his host is not debatable, but one must know that death in water may be caused by several processes: one of them results in an inundation of the lungs leading to asphyxia, another may be the process bringing about sudden heart failure, whereas, in other cases, the death results from injuries sustained by blows, if the body is violently thrown into the water for example. Of course, combinations of these processes can occur.

The drowning is mentioned in the Qur'an in sura 10, verse 90; sura 26, verse 66; sura 44, verse 24. Moreover, we read: "...We seized them and threw them away into the sea." (sura 28, verse 40; sura 51, verse 40) The action of "throwing away" or "flinging" is expressed in the Qur'an by the verb "*nabadha*." This verb appears five other times in the Qur'an, in its literal sense or in its figurative sense, as well: in sura 2, verses 100 and 101; sura 3, verse 187; sura 20, verse 96; and sura 37, verse 145. The text of the two verses quoted above (suras 28 and 51) concerning the death of the Egyptian pursuers has exactly expressed what we may read in the Bible about the violence of the force launched by God against them, since they are said to have been thrown into the sea where they fell "like stones" or "like lead." When a surgeon reads such

clear indications in a text, he thinks that the bodies must have been severely injured....

Very often, those who have exclusively drawn their attention to a drowning add in their comments a detail having a biblical origin, since no mention of it may be found in the Qur'an, i.e., that the pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea, which is supposed to have been crossed by the fleeing Hebrews, from one shore to another, on dry ground after the parting. In Part One of the present work, I have shown where, very likely, the crossing of the "sea of reeds" occurred (an arm of the Red Sea between the Gulf of Suez and the Bitter Lakes), and not from one shore of the Red Sea to another.

When in 1974-1975, I was at Cairo, investigating the mummy of Pharaoh Merenptah, I realized that most who asked themselves about the identity of the pharaoh of the Exodus had drawn at first their attention to the drowning in the sea and Merenptah. At the beginning of the 20th century, the French Egyptologist, G. Maspero, related that, according to a tradition coming from Alexandria, this pharaoh had participated in the Exodus: then the visitors to the Egyptian Museum found this information printed in their guide, written by G. Maspero. In our days, Merenptah is always considered as having been the pharaoh of the Exodus. Not long ago, a well-known medical doctor of Cairo wrote that the white areas of the face of the mummy (displayed until 1979 at the Museum and again in 1994) were the remains of the salts of the Red Sea which had impregnated the body for more than 32 centuries! What a strange awareness of mummification procedures, since the mummification could not have been carried out without leaving the body under heaps of dry Natron salts for weeks, this stage being followed by numerous washings. Nonetheless, the traditions in connection with the action of the Red Sea waters on the drowned body have widely propagated untenable ideas.

The medical investigations of Merenptah's mummy

"Today, We save thee in thy body, so that you mayest be a sign for those who come after thee." (sura 10, verse 92)

The identification of the pharaoh of the Exodus was carried out by corroborating Scriptural teachings with various data of recent secular knowledge. As far as the positioning in history of the Exodus was concerned, the teachings are provided by the Bible, since the Qur'an does not contain what might have been useful in the process of such a corroboration. Nonetheless, the interest of the knowledge of the biblical text does not go beyond the limits of the life of the pharaoh of the Exodus, since it is silent on what happened to the body of Pharaoh after his death. The Qur'an alone provides us with a teaching which has suggested, in our days, a fruitful comparison with secular knowledge.

Sura 10 which contains this announcement, was revealed in Mecca, i.e., necessarily before 622. At this time, nobody could have known the least thing about the destiny of the body of the pharaoh who had played a role in the Exodus. Since there is no Egyptian document relating the event, the Bible was then the one and unique source of information: its Hebrew version said that the pharaoh drowned in the "sea of reeds," whereas its Greek version (Septuagint) related a drowning in the Red Sea; the comments of the oldest editions of the Bible narrated that Pharaoh had been lost in the Red Sea. It is only after 1907 that one might have a precise idea of the destiny of the body after the Exodus from a secular point of view. Today, according to the data of modern knowledge, one cannot conceive another hypothesis concerning the identity of the pharaoh of the Exodus than to attribute this role to Merenptah.

1907 is the year when—after the removing of the outermost wrappings of the mummy, found in 1898 in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes—the body was identified as being that of Merenptah, whose name was written under the first layer of these wrappings. It had been discovered by the French Egyptologist V. Loret in another tomb than his personal burial place, for the latter had not been considered safe enough by the priests of the 21st dynasty around the beginning of the first millennium B.C. This story of the mummy was totally ignored at the time of the Qur'anic Revelation and nobody could then have known that the body of Merenptah had been saved.

In addition to this close correspondence between the Qur'anic text and modern knowledge, one must, once more, emphasize that an attentive reading of the Bible and the awareness of the chronology of the Egyptian sovereigns might have led one to assert—like K.R. Lepsius; in 1849

and many other Egyptologists after him—that Merenptah, as successor of Ramesses II, had been the pharaoh of the Exodus. Since his mummy was kept at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, it had appeared quite advisable to carry out medical investigations in search of data to be compared with Scriptural teachings.

In Part One of the present work, details have been given about the circumstances that allowed this research and the results of the enquiry; the latter had especially concerned the causes of death. In this research my collaborators, specialists in forensic medicine, played a great part and the conclusions were reported to the French society grouping the experts in this discipline.

The pharaoh died, victim of multiple traumas which had left on the mummy the obvious marks of the violence of the blows to several parts of the body. Thus, there were a large defect in the posterior part of the abdominal wall, a smaller defect in the anterior part of the thorax, an impact on a segment of the thorax having made it collapse, penetrating inside the thoracic cavity. In addition, there was a lacuna in the posterior part of the cranial vault, on which the mummy was lying; it had similarly resulted from violent blows. All these lesions on the right side of the body, were carefully studied by X-rays from a forensic point of view. No doubt that the cranial injury had very severe consequences: the underlying brain had been injured by the penetration of the detached bone fragment and death had occurred very likely rapidly, if not immediately. What we read in sura 28, verse 40 and sura 51, verse 40, i.e., that the pursuers had been “thrown away in the waters” is in close correspondence with these medical findings.

Moreover, we took a small sample of the muscle of the mummy. When it was examined under the microscope, the persistence of certain characteristics of the muscular fibrillae led the specialists to conclude that the body could not have remained a long time in the water—otherwise such details would have disappeared. Such a finding is to be put in parallel with the teaching of the Qur'an, which says that the body had been saved the day of event. (sura 10, verse 92)

Thus, about the last episode of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, the Qur'anic text provided us with teachings of a particular significance, since, when they are joined to what the Bible clearly asserts or suggests—in the light of secular knowledge for both Scriptures—they indicate clearly that Merenptah was the pharaoh of the Exodus.

Part Three

General Survey of the Research—Comparison of Both Narrations

Despite the differences between the narrations, a careful examination of their texts has shown that they deal with the same main episodes. Moreover, in this process, today one can take into account the data of secular knowledge, supplied by diverse disciplines, in order to establish comparisons between the narratives: we have found many opportunities to conduct such new tests with great profit.

The Qur'anic text is more brief and much less rich in details concerning the events than the biblical text, the former mainly giving emphasis to spiritual perspectives. It is not frequent that the Qur'an deals with events which are not related by the Bible, but some of these details are highly significant. One of them has a special historical importance: the narration of the death of the pharaoh during the Exodus, predicting that the body of the king would be saved.

Among the biblical teachings, we put stress on the five major points, whose account, juxtaposed with secular knowledge, was crucial for the insertion into history of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt. Since no mention of them exists in the Qur'an, such an insertion could not have been established through an exclusive reference to the Qur'anic narrations. In the past, it followed that, when Muslim commentators tried to establish such an insertion into history of the events that had mainly drawn their attention—the entry into Egypt with Joseph and the Exodus with Moses—they often referred to teachings of the Bible, as useful complements.

We shall give special emphasis to the general characteristics of the narrations that enlighten this complementarity and which might appear to exegetes as being, at once, unexpected and surprising. But, beforehand, it is instructive to report the points toward which, in the past, the specialists have turned their commentaries, and what they thought to have discovered, with more or less accuracy through the centuries. Then we shall reach the end of the work, mentioning what may be deduced in the light of recent secular knowledge.

1. General Survey of the Research and its Results

First conjectures

I refer to old editions of the Bible that were published in France; their commentaries are most instructive for this point. In old times, the books of the Bible were the unique sources of teachings about the history of the Hebrews and Moses, who played a crucial part in the Exodus. The Bible itself had located the latter in time: I Kings (6:1) taught that this major event had occurred 480 years before the building of the Temple of Solomon. Considering what was then supposed about the date of the reign of this king, the Exodus was located during the 15th century B.C. So, the Bible published in 1768, that I have previously quoted, suggested 1491 B.C. By referring to this date concerning the Exodus, deductions were made about other events: the entry into Egypt and the time of Moses. Moreover, since the pharaoh was considered lost in the Red Sea, one did not have to discuss the destiny of his body. As to the crossing of the whole width of the Red Sea, the commentary contained a clear-sighted reflection; although bashfully put, the question was posed.

For many centuries, the sources were essentially of biblical origin. One did not dare to mention contradictions in the texts. The Bible was considered as being "the Word of God." It would have been shamefully irreligious to suggest that the texts might arouse questions about certain unlikely details. We have previously mentioned what happened to Father Richard Simon during the 17th century when he had audaciously opened a debate: he brought down Bossuet's wrath upon him and was reduced to silence.

Despite the lack of rich secular documentation, we must note that several exegetes of the Bible, in those times, knew to read the Bible quite logically and take advantage of some extra-biblical data. For example, in the 1768 edition of the Bible, revised by Dom Augustin Calmet, Mitred Abbot of Senones Abbey (France), the commentaries on the book of Exodus show that their authors had concern for history. Maybe they had not read the *Annals* by Tacitus which contained the Latin name of "Rhamsis," a name that was close to "Ramesses" quoted by the Bible,

but they were surely aware of the lists of kings of Egypt by Manetho, reported by Flavius Josephus during the 1st century A.D. Thus, in their commentary on the death of the king of Egypt, when Moses was in the land of Midian (Exodus 2:23), they assumed that the successor of the latter, who perished during the Exodus, was a certain "Amenophis." This identity (reported on page 100, note 23 of this edition) was erroneous—as inaccurate as the date of the Exodus according to the Bible—nevertheless such a commentary, dating back to the 18th century, was closer to the truth than what is suggested by many specialists in the 20th century, who have at their disposal substantial documentation. From this former comparison between a biblical teaching and an ancient secular document, there remains, nonetheless, an accurate statement that dates back to the 18th century: the pharaoh of the Exodus was the successor of this "Ramesses," quoted by the Bible through the name of his "city."

Decisive information could not have been given before the middle of the 19th century, following the discovery of the key to hieroglyphics by Champollion in 1822. Then, a chronology of the sovereigns of Egypt could be established on a sound basis, and, in 1849, K.R. Lepsius, who knew that the successor of Ramesses II was Merenptah, was the first to state that the latter was the pharaoh of the Exodus.

Some risky and unconvincing hypotheses

During the second part of the 19th century, what was so logically deduced from the biblical text about the death of the pharaoh of the Exodus seemed to have not aroused disapproval. An element of doubt began to hang over the matter after the discovery of the mummy which had been identified in 1907 as belonging to Merenptah. Some authors claimed that this mummy could not be the mummy of a pharaoh who was said to have perished in the Red Sea. Some others emphasized that, since the Bible does not *explicitly* mention the death of the king of Egypt during the Exodus, it would have been more logical to come back to another theory and scrutinize the question with the basic hypothesis that follows: if the pharaoh did not lose his life during the event, one must search for an answer through hypotheses suggesting the occurrence of

the Exodus in the course of a reign, without any consequence as to the life of the sovereign.

Then numerous assumptions were held; their common feature is that they were risky. The authors closely kept their minds on the date of departure of the Israelites from Egypt, without taking special care as to the consequence of their hypothesis upon other episodes of the stay of the Hebrews: were their assumptions in accordance with what was supposed about the entry into Egypt 430 years earlier according to the Bible? Were they in harmony with other teachings of the Scriptures or historical data?

The authors were greatly influenced by what was claimed by the archaeologists who had carried out excavations on the site of Jericho. In fact, the results of the latter were quite questionable. At a certain period, some authors had deduced from them that the Exodus could be located during the 15th century B.C., without considering another point: did the political situation in that time have any likeness to the events related in the Bible? There is no doubt that, during the nationalistic Tuthmoside period, the liberties taken by Moses, when he spoke to Pharaoh according to the Scriptures, would not have been conceivable. Moreover, by defending such a hypothesis concerning the Exodus, the authors did not care about the teaching of the Bible describing the construction of the city of Pi-Ramesses by the enslaved Hebrews, this teaching involving the impossibility of the occurrence of the event before the reign of a "Ramesses" (the first "Ramesses" had reigned circa 1400 B.C.).

As to the authors who had located the Exodus during the 13th century B.C., it appears that such an evaluation was broad: some of them suggested that Ramesses II would have been the pharaoh of the Exodus while others suggested Merenptah. Since one after the other ruled Egypt during more than three quarters of this century, the location in time was approximative. At this point, the authors had been greatly influenced by the results of excavations on the site of Jericho which were different from the previous ones, for these results were diversely interpreted, as they were not considered to have any significance at all. In addition, the same authors might have been wrongly impressed by the meaning of a passage from the *Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign*, that suggested—in their opinion—that the Hebrews had then already settled in Canaan.

With the support given by these two inaccurate suppositions, some authors deduced that the Exodus had occurred in the course of Ramesses II's reign itself.

And the errors became thicker, when preconceived ideas led certain authors to imagine that Moses' spiritual concepts would have come from Akhenaten's influence (others had suggested the influence of Ramesses II himself, as we have seen), all that without the least evidence.

In order to be clearly informed about the flimsiness of such reasoning, I suggest referring to the article "Moses," written in French by Father H. Cazelles, in the *Supplement to the Fifth Volume of the Biblical Dictionary* by L. Pirot (1957, pp.1320-1326). The documentation is significant: a hypothesis about the occurrence of the Exodus at the beginning of Ramesses II's reign is held on the following bases: the good will of Pharaoh Horemheb towards the Semites led one to conclude that Moses received from the king special protection; in fact no historical proof is given of such an assertion, no more than for the influence of the concern of Horemheb for equity upon Moses, who, of course, shared the same concern. Sethos I was in need of forced laborers and Ramesses II might have been facing revolts in Canaan, but these authentic historical data cannot, *by themselves*, lead one to suppose that they provoked the enslavement of the Hebrews and the Exodus during the reign of Ramesses II, and consequently that the youth of Moses might have dated back to Horemheb's rule of Egypt.... Such deductions cannot be considered as valid arguments.

How could it be surprising that experts in biblical historiography, requiring proofs, had expressed their doubts about such conclusions? We know that, in 1962-1965, the participants in the Second Vatican Council were appealed to over the question of the degree of credibility of certain Scriptural teachings—as far as the Old Testament was concerned, the narrations of the religious events which had been studied by specialists in "biblical sciences" were examined, but unfortunately, on the points evoked in the present work, their conclusions appeared as being hardly decisive.

Such an appraisal of the results which were obtained at this time aroused comments that drew our attention. We found them in a study of a young professor of exegesis of the Old Testament at the Vatican Biblical Institute, Father Norbert Lohfink, which was published in

France in 1966; during the Council, he had been granted his highest degree and his thesis was then considered as an “event.” Under the title *Biblical Sciences in Motion* (translation published by Casterman, Paris), his study revealed the failure of the attempts whose aim was to give a historical basis to the events:

The main problems dealt with by the biblical historiography posed questions, because, about several periods, it is difficult to connect the religious events—from a chronological or other point of view—with what we have learned from other sources of history of the past. (p.31)

Taking notice of such an impossibility—about 30 years ago—the author had expressed his regret at the “lack of interest of the biblical narrations for the true course of the events,” particularly for what happened during the second millennium B.C., quoting the period of the patriarchs and the history of Moses besides other events. We perceived the importance he gave to the events concerning Moses.

If the studies that had preceded the reflections of this professor of the Vatican Biblical Institute had brought conviction from a historical point of view, he would not have expressed so much censorious judgment.

Therefore, when we take into account the history of the research, are we not permitted to question the value of many works and their consequences? If the biblical narrations had been commented on with the help of the data of secular knowledge, instead of their being presented by exegetes having a liking for imaginative constructions, would the interest in the course of the events related by the Scriptures have been higher? Of course, several decades ago, their comments could not have taken advantage of what was discovered after 1974. Nevertheless, they might have benefitted from a logical reading of the Bible—as in ancient times—suggesting that the pharaoh died during the Exodus. In this way, the deductions would have been more coherent with the texts and closer to what today appears as being the truth.

How have the previous failures called for new means of study?

The remarks made by unsatisfied exegetes invited me to use new means of investigation whose aim would be to contribute to increasing the data of secular knowledge. Moreover, at the origin of the failures of the previous study, it appeared that the basic error was the error of the authors having denied the death of the pharaoh of the Exodus: such a mistaken starting-point in the reasoning could explain the deductions that were drawn during the last decades.

In ancient times, nobody could imagine that the pharaoh did not die during the Exodus. During the 20th century, the Bible was read differently and many hypotheses about the location in time of the event were piled up one after another.

Finally, the names of two pharaohs had been, most of the time, quoted as having played a part in the Exodus, i.e., Ramesses II and Merenptah. Since their mummies were kept in Egypt, it appeared that one could imagine that, if the opportunity was given, their study might be liable to show data about the circumstances of the end of their life; so, the idea of a possible investigation came to my mind.

In 1974, I began to conduct the research, considering that the death of a pharaoh during the Exodus would have to be taken into account first. Then, it was obviously clear that Ramesses II could not have been in a position to play a part in the event: a severe disease, whose diagnosis was made with certainty, would not have allowed it. On the contrary, the investigation of the mummy of his successor Merenptah showed that the pharaoh died tragically and suddenly, in close conformity with the Scriptural teachings. Thus, after the series of risky hypotheses that had not convinced, the medical findings brought new elements: they had been the first ones, chronologically speaking, to have opened other horizons.

These data were completed by the discoveries made between 1980 and 1986 by the German archaeologists on the site of the city of Pi-Ramesses quoted in the Bible: they let us know the exact date of the beginning of the construction of this city and, moreover, they completed our knowledge on what had been erected on the same Eastern part of the Nile River delta, where the Hyksos built their capital four centuries

before. In this way, we discover another point of correspondence with the biblical text.

Today, a more precise location in time of certain events having marked the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt allows us to correct the previous interpretation given to the *Stela of the Fifth Year of Merenptah's Reign*, as far as the word "Israil" is concerned, for the interpretation of its meaning had led to historical error.

Moreover, a better insertion of these events into the political history of Egypt, due to these new elements, made possible a better understanding of the meaning of hieroglyphic data related to the religious events. The interest of these data—which were discovered a long time ago—was not grasped at first. Despite that they are rare, these documents now reveal a significance that could not have been so accurately interpreted.

Therefore, today we possess data that can be used in Scriptural historiography, while, in the past, they were either unknown or wrongly interpreted. The special importance of the new elements, which now lead us to draw precise conclusions, lies in the fact that they have multi-disciplinary origins; thus, *they make it possible to crosscheck what is deduced from each*: history, archaeology, epigraphy and medical research, being associated here, provide data, for the purpose of promoting a new way of research, whose aims are to contribute to the history of the events and to the study of the Scriptural texts as well. Such a way of thinking, of course, differs from old habits that led one to rely on the texts exclusively. I remember having received a letter from an eminent specialist of the Hebrew language who, about the same questions of historical interest, let me know that, "as far as the problem of Israel in Egypt was concerned," he was a "skeptic about all that was not found in the texts."

One could not deny the usefulness of the texts; but, today, they appear not to bring sufficient means in and of themselves: they need to be completed or corrected by the new elements which led us to discover what we have reported. And the results of the corroboration of the biblical texts and modern secular knowledge will appear, in their turn, as having the utmost importance with a view to making comparisons between the biblical and Qur'anic narrations.

2. Comparison between the Biblical and Qur'anic Narrations

Major correspondences between the biblical narrations and modern knowledge

We have clearly shown that each major event related by the Bible can be fit into the history of Egypt thanks to a certain number of modern data: some of them appear to be fundamental, the others concerning mere details. So, we could point out the main stages of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt as follows:

- The entry into Egypt happened around the middle of the 17th century B.C., during the time of the domination by the Hyksos.
- Moses was born around the beginning of the 13th century B.C.
- Moses, who had been exiled from Egypt, returned from Midian after the death of the king of Egypt. This king is Ramesses II: we know that his death occurred around 1235-1224 B.C.—these dates are approximate, since Egyptian chronology is uncertain.
- The sons of Israel were still in Egypt during the fifth year of Merenptah's reign according to the *Stela of Israel*, i.e., around 1230-1219 B.C.
- Moses' request of Pharaoh to let Israel go and the Exodus from Egypt took place during the last quarter of the 13th century B.C. One cannot come to a closer location in time since we do not know the exact duration of Merenptah's reign (at least 10 years).

These chronological estimates could not have been made without the existence in the biblical texts of several precise teachings that allow comparisons with various data of modern knowledge. Among these teachings, five of them appear to be essential, and no more than five are requisite for such a fitting into history:

- a) The first teaching—the most unexpected—is as follows. Many centuries after the event, a biblical author chose the language of his time in order to give a name to the land where the first Hebrews dwelled, calling it “land of Ramesses.” This writer used the name of the famous pharaoh who had built his northern capital four centuries after the coming of the Hebrews to the same place. Today, we know that the Hyksos kings had also settled their capital in this oriental district of the Nile delta. The excavations of the German archaeologists, carried out during the years 1980-1986, after the previous digging up, by others, of remains of the ancient Hyksos city “Avaris,” have provided the historians with many precise data. Thus, when the biblical author uses the name of Ramesses (Genesis, 47:11) the anachronism is obvious, but, by doing so, in fact he indicates the place where the two major events occurred and the time when the first Hebrews settled.
- b) The book of Exodus (1:11) mentions that the enslaved Hebrews built for Pharaoh the city of Pi-Ramesses, which narration is immediately followed by another aspect of oppression of the Hebrews, the deliberate killing of the newborn males, from which Moses, just born, escaped. The biblical teaching concerning Pi-Ramesses is a major one, since the German archaeologists have recently established that the building of the city of Pi-Ramesses dates back to Sethos I’s reign, around the beginning of the 13th century B.C.; thus, as an indirect result, they give us useful information about the time of Moses.
- c) One must also consider as a major correspondence the mention in the Bible of the death of the king during Moses’ exile in the land of Midian (Exodus 2:23). The king is Ramesses II, and his death is known as having occurred in 1235-1224 B.C. approximately.
- d) The book of Exodus (7:7) says that, when Moses requested liberty for his brethren, he was 80. Since the preceding data showed that the successor of Ramesses II was Pharaoh Merenptah, and that Moses was born around the

beginning of the 13th century B.C. (i.e., the time of Sethos I), it is interesting to compare the interval of time between Sethos I's reign and Merenptah's reign to this biblical teaching: in round figures, it is 80 years.

- e) The book of Exodus (12:40) says that the duration of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt was 430 years. Since we know that the Exodus, as final event of this stay, happened in the last quarter of the 13th century B.C. (end of Merenptah's reign) and that the entry dates back to the middle of the 17th century B.C., there is a correspondence between this teaching of the Bible and these two data of history.

Thanks to these five major biblical teachings, one can fit each of these events into history. As far as the Exodus is concerned, the chronology of ancient Egypt does not allow a margin of error of less than a dozen years.

The chronological data of the Book of Kings and Book of Judges have not been taken into account for the following reason: as to events concerning the Hebrews and other occurrences, the experts in exegesis do not generally agree with their chronological references.

Special characteristics of the Qur'anic narrations

In the preceding chapters concerning the Qur'an, I have never referred to the possibility of a corroboration of a scriptural teaching with the data of modern knowledge which might have led to fitting a narration into history, contrary to what was done for the Bible. One might be surprised at such a general characteristic of the Qur'an when, about other topics like the phenomena of nature, one knows that there are verses of the Book which call for corroborations with modern knowledge. In fact, for events of the stay of the Hebrews in Egypt, no Qur'anic relation can be paralleled with historical data with a view to locating it in time. None of the five major biblical teachings that were evoked above can be found in the Qur'anic text.

One must emphasize a consequence having much significance: supposing we only possessed the Qur'anic text and the data of modern knowledge that I have previously evoked, the attempt of such a

corroboration would have been unsuccessful. Nevertheless, as to the essential aspects concerning Moses and the history of the Hebrews, both Qur'anic and biblical narrations are similar, despite the Qur'anic narrations being more succinct than the biblical ones.

Besides this general characteristic, which appears after a comparative reading of both Holy Scriptures, one must put stress on three distinctive features:

- a) The Qur'an does not mention the number of Hebrew people fleeing from Egypt with Moses (we had reservations about the mass of the fugitives to which emphasis is given in the Bible). Moreover, the Qur'an differently describes the capabilities of the magicians practicing sorcery before Pharaoh. According to the Bible, they would have been able to really make animals appear suddenly, to change water into blood and to provoke population of frogs all over the land of Egypt. The Qur'an describes them as conjurers. How could they have had supernatural powers, as was the case for Moses?
- b) While in the biblical narration of the history of Joseph there are two obvious anachronisms concerning the beasts of burden and the naming of the king of Egypt, the Qur'anic text relates a different version. Despite what most of the translators have written, the word "camel" does not appear in sura 12, "Joseph." Today, we know that camels were not domesticated in ancient Egypt, and that, at the time of Joseph the king of Egypt was not yet "Pharaoh," as the Bible says. As far as these two points are concerned, the Qur'anic text is in close conformity with the reality of the time of Joseph, while a biblical author or a copyist wrote his narration using the language of his time. At the time of the Qur'anic Revelation, there was no human knowledge of these two facts, as we have explained.
- c) There was no human knowledge, as well, at this time, about two other Qur'anic teachings which are not found in the Bible: the name of an intimate person belonging to the close circle of Pharaoh, "Haman," and the announcement of what happened to the dead body of Pharaoh.

What we read in the Qur'an about them is in close conformity with modern data in the field of Egyptology.

From this point of view, it would be greatly erroneous to imagine that, from the time when the final texts of the Old Testament were written to the occurrence of the Qur'anic Revelation, the approximate interval of one millennium which elapsed was propitious for increasing secular knowledge of matters concerned here, to such an extent that man was able to possess more science than a long time before.

It is just the reverse that happened. At the period when the books of the Old Testament were composed, the knowledge of the history of ancient Egypt was persistent; thus, in the Bible we find names of persons of ancient times, among them the name of "Ramesses," a quotation which had taught a great deal to Champollion. But, at the time of the Qur'anic Revelation, the conditions were entirely different; all the Egyptologists are aware of the emptiness of the knowledge in their field from the end of the 4th century A.D. to the 19th century.

In a book whose aim is to initiate in Egyptology, *A la recherche de l'Egypte oubliée (In Search of Forgotten Egypt)*, published by Gallimard, Paris, Professor Jean Vercoutter evokes the initial stages of this long emptiness in Egyptological knowledge as follows (pp.13-28). At Byzantium:

...in 391, the Emperor Theodosius I ordered closure of all the pagan temples of the Empire. In Egypt, very likely the followers of gods and goddesses were not numerous, but the closing of temples had another consequence: i.e., for the hieroglyphic writing which was still in use, it suddenly ceased to be understood.

Except the priests:

...nobody was able to read the texts engraved on the monuments, when they were still standing up, or written on papyruses kept in the libraries. Unfortunately, in the flames of the library of Alexandria (47 B.C.), the history of Egypt vanished.... This library was said to have contained seven

hundred thousand books; among them many concerning the history of the pharaohs, such as the famous *History of Egypt*, in 30 volumes, by Manetho, written in Greek.

Professor Vercoutter mentions that copies of the original works that were kept in the library of the Serapis Temple at Alexandria also disappeared when this temple was closed and burnt in 391; in this way:

...all the works that had escaped from the disaster in 47 B.C. were destroyed. Consequently, in the middle of the fifth century A.D., nobody was able to read or understand the ancient Egyptian texts. Moreover, of all that was written in Greek by the Egyptians themselves, in order to let foreign people occupying their country be aware of its history, everything had vanished by this time.

Among the fragments of knowledge which could survive, mentions are made by the author of the books of Genesis and Exodus of the Bible, narrations relating legends (by Plutarch) or journeys (by Herodotus and Diodorus of Sicily), geography (by Strabo) and reports of the journey of Germanicus in Egypt by Tacitus in the time of Jesus. None of these works was able to bring a contribution to the human knowledge of what is in connection with the present study (except the Bible, but none of its fundamental teachings concerning the Hebrews, as mentioned above, is quoted in the Qur'an).

When we examine the Qur'anic teachings on which special emphasis is laid in this commentary, we must consider that people were unaware of the history of ancient Egypt after the 5th century A.D. Consequently, *each of the Qur'anic teachings that we have mentioned was strictly unknown at the time of the Qur'anic Revelation*. No other objective conclusion can be drawn when the contents of the Qur'an are enlightened from this perspective by the firmly established data of Egyptology.

These data have brought a great contribution to the study of the biblical narrations, supporting the correctness of many conclusions drawn by the exegetes concerning the history of the texts and giving emphasis to the share belonging to the writers of certain narrations of events, when they are corroborated with modern discoveries.

As to the Qur'an, such a corroboration could not be carried out since the fundamental details mentioned in the biblical narrations—as evoked above—are not found in its text. Nevertheless, special force must be given to the fact that modern secular knowledge is unable to find the least assertion which would not be in close conformity with the history of events or any other well-known matter. Moreover, modern secular knowledge allows us to discover several teachings concerning matters which were strictly unknown when the Qur'an was communicated to men.

Now, it is up to the exegetes of the Qur'an and the Bible to direct their objective attention to these facts and this reality and draw conclusions.

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The holy scriptures of the three Abrahamic religions share some of the main aspects of historical events which happened after prophet Abraham. One topic which reveals many such shared aspects is the story of Moses who rose up against the despotic Pharaoh. The events during this period are important to the Muslims, Jews and Christians, and in many cases form the basis of the history and rituals of the three religions. This work is a comparative study of the Biblical and Qur'anic narrations of the story of Moses and Pharaoh. In doing so, Dr Bucaille carefully avoids theoretical and speculative views in an attempt to cope only with facts.

Maurice Bucaille, born in 1920, former chief of the Surgical Clinic, University of Paris, has been for a long time deeply interested in the correspondences between the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and modern secular knowledge. He is author of the bestseller *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (1976). His classical studies of the scriptural languages, including literary Arabic, in association with his knowledge of hieroglyphics, have allowed him to hold a multidisciplinary inquiry, in which his personal contribution as a medical doctor has produced conclusive arguments. His work, *Mummies of the Pharaohs—Modern Medical Investigations* (1987), won a History Prize from the Académie Française and another prize from the French National Academy of Medicine.

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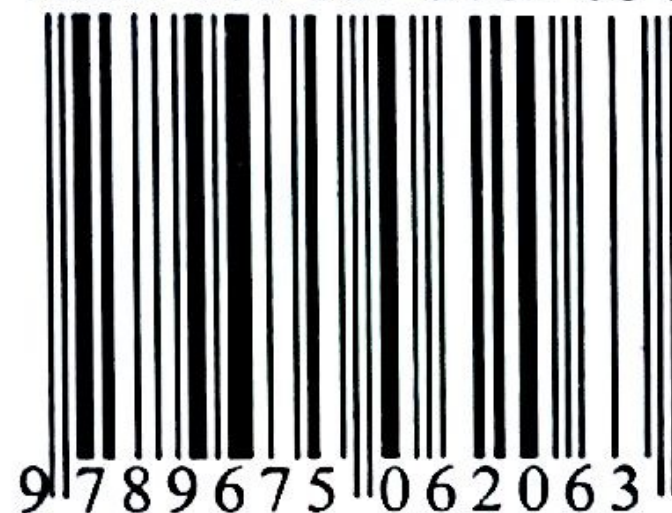
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MOSES AND PHARAOH

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